

SCARLET POPPY

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"SCARLET POPPY"

- * *All dialogue between Afghans in Pashto unless noted.*
- * *All dialogue between Westerners and/or Westerners and Afghans in English unless otherwise noted.*

EXT. REMOTE AFGHANISTAN MOUNTAIN - LATE AFTERNOON

SUPER: AFGHANISTAN, HELMAND PROVINCE, March 2013

Five sure-footed AFGHANS quickly climb a steep mountainside. They race up the slope and playfully cut each other off.

TITLE AND OPENING CREDITS ROLL

The bearded men wear Afghan longshirts with black and grey turbans and simple rubber shoes. One of the younger Afghans carries a backpack that seems too heavy and bulky for him.

The largest and oldest of them, DADULLAH, 36, loses his balance near a ledge, but recovers with no hint of fear. They all laugh at his near fatal mistake. Dadullah finally sprints past all of them and is the first to the top of the mountain.

DADULLAH

Ha! Twice your age, but you will
never beat me!

Dadullah sits on the rocks as the others arrive to catch their breath. The others then sit and rest as Dadullah motions to one of the younger ones. Dadullah's handed a pair of binoculars. Dadullah scans the remote and barren desert valley below, where a dirt road cuts through.

Dadullah pulls a satellite phone, makes a quick call.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

Well? Yes. Yes. Very good. Allah be
with you.
(hangs up, stands)
Come.

They walk down the mountain, toward the road.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

Dadullah and his younger friends stealthily arrive at a spot below, near the road. They move behind some large rocks.

DADULLAH

Let me have the backpack.

The younger Afghan with the heavy backpack pulls it and hands it to Dadullah, who seems unaffected by its weight. Dadullah walks toward the road. He stops, and with one hand pulls a sagebrush from the ground, by the roots. He carries it.

Dadullah walks onto the dirt road. He crouches, opens the backpack, pulls a folding shovel, extends it, quickly and very professionally digs a hole in the dirt near the center of the road. He makes sure to separate the lighter topsoil from the darker soil beneath.

From the backpack he pulls a crude looking lump of explosives and wires, with a little box stuck to the top. He carefully places the device, arms the little box. A white LED flashes.

Satisfied, Dadullah covers the hole, first with the dark soil, and then with the light. When fully covered, he gently uses the sagebrush to make the spot blend perfectly.

He turns and leisurely walks back to the spot behind the rocks. No one says a word.

They wait. A beat. Two. Dadullah rises, motions again for the binoculars. The younger one hands them off, Dadullah scans. His reaction tells us he's seen something; the sound of a vehicle approaching OS tells us more.

Dadullah kneels. He then pulls a small remote control device. He arms it, a green LED flashes. He rests his thumb in the trigger button.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

A Toyota Land Cruiser speeds down the road, leaves a huge plume of dust.

INT. LAND CRUISER

Two AMERICAN CIVILIAN SECURITY CONTRACTORS. Security Guy #1 drives; Security Guy #2 keeps a wary eye all around.

SECURITY GUY #1

Any of those sandwiches left?

On this, their world massively explodes from beneath, and the Land Cruiser flips through the air.

EXT. ROADSIDE

The overturned Land Cruiser has a spot fire on the oil pan. It grows. The tires spin helplessly.

Dadullah approaches, warily. He pulls a large handgun from beneath his shirt, carries it casually with him.

Dadullah bends down to inspect the cab of the overturned Land Cruiser. He points the pistol, stoically fires three rounds. He re-positions the muzzle, fires another three.

Dadullah then casually walks away as the oil pan fire spreads. The fire grows to engulf, and black smoke rises.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SAME ROAD - NIGHT

Black of night; only a crescent moon.

CLOSE ON a tire of the overturned Land Cruiser. A SCORPION hunts in the sand next to the tire; a long line of ANTS carry bits of flesh away.

EXPLORE the smoking, hulking carcass of the Land Cruiser until we rest on a badly charred hand pressed against the cracked glass of the front window.

Gradually, the wind picks up, the tire spins ever so slowly, and the scorpion scurries away.

INT. CHISHTI SHARIF RESTAURANT - DAY

SUBTITLE: TOWN OF CHISHTI SHARIF (HERAT PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN) APRIL 2013

Dark restaurant, in the style of the locals. Slow ceiling fans. An open-air style entrance, with large, uncovered windows. Most of the light in the restaurant is from the noon-ish outside sun.

Through the uncovered windows, the dirt street outside is clearly seen: Opposite the restaurant is a white-washed wall that obscures the BG landscape, save for a clear noon sky. Just near the wall is a pair of ancient-looking pines.

There's no one in the restaurant, aside from...

NIC

Saffron.

Nic places a clear, cork-stoppered vial of wispy red saffron spice on a table, next to a pair of tea cups. He's mid 40-ish, salt-and-pepper good looks, dressed casual.

At the small table across from Nic is an AFGHAN WARLORD, 54, in full beard and customary attire. The warlord has a sharp, savvy appearance that belies his sweaty and dirty exterior.

In the BG behind the warlord stand WARLORD SECURITY #1 and #2, with rested shotguns and traditional Afghan clothing. In the deeper BG, near the doorway and observing the street, is WARLORD SECURITY #3, with a rested AK-47 assault rifle.

The unimpressed warlord looks at the vial without moving.

NIC (CONT'D)

First, it's legal. Everywhere.
Second, worth a lot. Almost the
same as poppy, per kilo. And,
nobody's breathing down your neck
from an office in a country you've
never been to. You know, heroin,
and all. Besides, poppy isn't good
...*Pashtunwali*.

The warlord stares at him coldly a couple beats, picks up the vial of saffron and examines it.

WARLORD

"The West Is the Best". Who was the
singer who said that?

NIC

Jim Morrison. What he meant was—

WARLORD

Why would so many people in the
best place in the world need our
poppy drugs?

NIC
I don't know. *I* don't.

The warlord gently puts the vial down.

WARLORD
Money from poppy is very good right now. For Taliban, for me, everyone. Very good. Bad Pashtunwali? Eh. Pashtunwali and money never like each other, anyway.

Nic considers for a beat.

NIC
Okay. And how much of that very good money *stays* here? In the country.

WARLORD
More money than Paki table spice would make stay.

NIC
Yeah? And when did "*table spice*" ever put a corrupt president in power? Or buy-off foreign security? Look, this place can't go on like it is now. It needs nice things. Saffron, pomegranates, olives. Nice things. Poppy isn't nice. It's a dead end.

The warlord considers Nic, takes a sip of tea.

WARLORD
How much will your people get from saffron and fruit trees?

NIC
I don't understand.

WARLORD
Your cut.

NIC
Nothing. We just wanna help.

The warlord laughs heartily.

WARLORD

Nic, do not insult me. Your USAID groups and United Nations are here not for Afghanistan, but for you.

NIC

Even if that's true, and it's not, can it hurt to—

WARLORD

Many in Herat have *already* saffron farming. Many elsewhere, too. But Iran floods saffron market. Price drops 60%. Poppy? Price doesn't drop. Ever. Prices go up.

NIC

I know. We're working on it. The Iran thing.

WARLORD

Iran will not listen. If Iran will not listen, why should Afghanistan?

Disturbance on the street outside.

Two TALIBAN with strapped assault rifles cross the street. They forcefully escort an AFGHAN GIRL in purple burqa. A third TALIB follows behind, assault rifle loosely leveled.

The girl doesn't struggle or resist in any way. Everyone in the restaurant watches as the two Talib escorts very quickly place the girl against one of the trees.

The two Talibs then back away, and in a casual move they unshoulder their weapons and shoot the girl with quicks bursts of about five rounds each. Her body is ripped and punctured brutally, she falls and contracts, quite dead. Blood pools immediately around her.

In the restaurant the warlord glances at Nic, who meets his eyes, fully. Nic has no expression: Not shock, not anything.

WARLORD (CONT'D)

Too much western TV and magazine,
Allah rest her soul.

Nic's cellular vibrates. Once. Twice. On the third buzz...

NIC

Excuse me.

He stands to take the call, moves closer to the restaurant windows to better see outside.

NIC (CONT'D)

Nic Johnson.

EMILY

(VO only; we never see
Emily)

Hi, dad.

NIC

Emily!

He moves the phone from his ear, looks at the screen. It does in fact say "Emily". He's not pleased.

NIC (CONT'D)

Em, dad's crazy busy right now. Can
I call you a little later?

EMILY

Like you did last time?

Nic watches as five AFGHAN FAMILY MEMBERS tend the dead girl's body, two WOMEN of the group wail in pain and grief. Blood soaks the girl's clothes and the ground.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I stayed up really late just to
call you.

NIC

You shouldn't do that.

EMILY

I'm 10 now, dad. It's fine.

Outside, a small pickup truck quickly arrives for the body. Nic watches as the dead girl is loaded onto the bed.

NIC

I'm sorry, Em, I really am, but I
just can't talk right now.

One of the girl's family members loses his grip from slippery blood and the girl's body flops awkwardly. They all stop to correct the body's position.

EMILY

You don't really want to talk to me anymore, do you?

NIC

No! Never! It's not that. Look, promise I'll back this time. Okay?

The Afghan family members finish loading the dead girl into the little truck.

EMILY

Fine.

NIC

I will. But I really have to go, now. Be good, okay?

EMILY

Whatever. Bye, dad.

Nic hangs up, looks at the phone a couple beats, clearly conflicted. Then he watches the Afghan family members carry the dead girl away. Nic returns to the restaurant table.

WARLORD

Trouble?

NIC

Family stuff.

The warlord laughs, stands. He assess Nic studiously.

WARLORD

Nic, we will consider this idea of new crops. I am sure we will decide against it. But if not...I will let you know.

They shake hands.

WARLORD (CONT'D)

The West Is the Best.

NIC
(amused)
The West Is the Best. Khuda hafez.

WARLORD
Khuda hafez.

The warlord leaves with his security guys. Nic leaves immediately afterward, walks outside.

EXT. CHISHTI SHARIF RESTAURANT - DAY

Nic enters the blazing Afghan day, shields his eyes as they follow a trail of blood to the pickup truck slowly driving away with the girl's body.

We now see, geographically, the orientation of the street, the restaurant, and Afghan landscape.

And Nic right in the middle.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. KABUL CITY - DUSK - QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS

SUPER: KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

Lively crowded Kabul city streets: Vehicles, men, women, children, traditional and modern Afghans.

A group of women in burqas: MEDIUM SHOT of their feet as they walk the muddy street; high heels, red-painted toes.

EXT. SERENA HOTEL - EVENING INTO NIGHT

A heavily fortified checkpoint with AFGHAN HOTEL GUARDS inspecting vehicles. A long line of UN, military, and unmarked cars wait for clearance, all PASSENGERS wear formal party attire.

At the front is a UN vehicle. Guards inspect vehicle's undercarriage with a long mirrored pole. Satisfied, they open a large iron gate, vehicle moves forward and passes through.

Next in line is an old Russian beat-up yellow & white taxi cab, the common Kabuli mode of transport. Inside the cab is Nic, who sits in the front seat with his AFGHAN DRIVER. Nic wears an impeccable tux but he's fussing with his bowtie, trying to see himself in the visor mirror.

Nic slaps the visor up, yanks the bowtie off and tosses it the back seat.

INT./EXT. CAB

The driver rolls down his window; Afghan Hotel Guard talks to him in dubbed Dari.

HOTEL GUARD #1
You can't come in here with that
piece of shit!

AFGHAN DRIVER
My passenger is a foreigner.

HOTEL GUARD #1
I don't care. He gets out *here*.

The driver turns to Nic, who's already exiting. Nic leans back into the cab, hands the driver some Afghanis (currency).

NIC
(in Dari)
Tell the guard to go fuck himself.

INT. BACK BALLROOM OF THE SERENA - NIGHT

A mediocre BAND plays an out-of-date pop song. A large sign behind the band reads "WELCOME TO THE BRITISH BALL".

The ballroom is full of ELEGANTLY-DRESSED WESTERNERS: UN and NGO types, civilian contractors, American and British military, some high-ranking.

Dance floor is crowded.

Nic enters, clearly not happy to be here. In his no-bowtie tux, he makes through the crowd, gives a few quick AD LIB greetings to various PERSONS as he moves toward the back bar.

Along the way Nic encounters a TWO-STAR US ARMY GENERAL, 55. Nic seems very familiar with him, and unlike others he's met tonight, Nic's happy to see him. Their chat is very brief and MOS. Nic then continues onward.

Nic clears the crowd, walks to the bar and waits in line. Nearby stands a sensual WESTERNIZED AFGHAN-LOOKING WOMAN, mid 30's, in a tight dress. She carries a small Prada handbag. She and Nic meet eyes, but do not approach one another.

At the bar Nic is next in line. He AD LIB orders from a BARTENDER, looks around a bit. Tight-dress woman is turned away from him now.

His drink arrives, he takes it.

WILLIAM
You're back!

Nic turns to WILLIAM, cleanly cut no-nonsense man about 45.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
How was it?

NIC
Same shit.

WILLIAM
That's why I rarely leave Kabul anymore. What's the point?

NIC
Kabul's gone to hell. Just contractors and guys like you.

WILLIAM
C'mon, Nic, don't you wanna make the world a better place? I do.

A loudspeaker breaks in.

WOMAN ON LOUDSPEAKER
Welcome to the British ball. We were going to burn a burqa tonight, in solidarity with our Afghan sisters, but we thought better of it.

(laughter)
(MORE)

WOMAN ON LOUDSPEAKER (CONT'D)

But imagine it in your mind, if you
will, these women who have been
subjugated for so long that—

WILLIAM

They shoulda just burned the burqa.

NIC

(dry)
And of course a Koran.

WILLIAM

Point taken.
(beat)
Nic, let me ask you something. You
would tell me if you saw any funny
stuff out there in that big ol' bad
countryside, wouldn't you?

NIC

Don't work for you guys anymore.

WILLIAM

The question stands.

Nic finishes his drink. Just then the tight-dress Afghan
woman sees him. Their eyes meet, lock for a second. Nic's
expression maintains.

NIC

(turns to leave)
I gotta go.

WILLIAM

Listen, come see me Thursday
morning. We should talk.
Professional, not personal.

NIC

Comforting. No thanks.

WILLIAM

Just come by. I insist. Something I
can still do now and then.

William gives a smug little smile to Nic, who walks out of
the bar toward the hotel lobby.

Tight-dress Afghan woman rushes up behind Nic, they walk
quickly side-by-side together, not looking at one another.

NIC
Hello, Rana.

RANA
(smiling)
"Hello," is it?

NIC
Yeah.

RANA
Great. Thought you'd never ask.

TIME CUT:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight through an open window, vague sounds of Kabul filter from outside.

Nic sits at the end of a sofa, drink in hand. He's naked, but we see little to nothing.

Clearly visible on a little table beside him is a black Beretta M9 pistol, an ammunition clip, an Afghan badge of some sort, and a few other personal items.

Rana stands next to him, near the open window but definitely not visible from the outside. She's also naked, in silhouette with moonlight behind her.

She puffs a hash joint, a long drag. She blows smoke into moonlight, holds the joint in her teeth as she turns and casually picks up the pistol and slaps the clip in.

She points the weapon at the window, takes another drag off the joint. In a deepened state of high she works her weapon, alternately inserting and removing the ammo clip, and pointing at the window here and there.

NIC
Do you really need to do that?

RANA
I do.
(coughs from smoke)

Nic stoically extends his hand. She examines it for a second, then gives him the pistol, reluctantly.

NIC

Thanks.

Nic puts the pistol back on the little table.

NIC (CONT'D)

You guys really need to go 40-cal.

RANA

This place is fucked, Nic. Fucked!
Why do you stay?

NIC

Can't beat the weather.

RANA

My relatives left a hundred years
ago, but they can't escape.
Descendents of Israelites cursed by
God! No escape for us.

(drags the joint)

We, the mighty and loyal Pashtun
warriors. Hah! Olive-size brains
and skins to match.

(thinks for a moment)

And attracted to the same sex, by
the way, even if we don't know it.

NIC

That's nice. Can I...?

Nic motions for the joint. Rana, stoned, brings it, collapses
on the couch beside him, her head thrown back against the
cushion. Nic takes a drag and finishes the drink. He stands.

NIC (CONT'D)

I really should go. Say "hi" to
Nabil for me.

He sets empty glass down, exits. Rana's too stoned to notice.

EXT. KABUL STREET - NIGHT

Nic exits the hotel. He walks out the front gate past the
guards from earlier, who look at him surprised.

AFGHAN GUARD #2

You want a taxi?

Nic waves without turning around and walks into the black Kabul night.

EXT. NIC'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Nic arrives, on foot, at a modest Afghan mud brick home surrounded by a 10' cement wall that's topped with razor wire. There's a small guard house in front. Nic's guard AHMED is inside, who rises from slumber.

AHMED

(Dari)

You walked home again?

NIC

(Dari)

Is the power on?

AHMED

No.

NIC

Hit the generator.

Nic walks through the yard and into his house. Parked in a driveway is a used Toyota 4Runner. A rooster crows in the BG.

INT. NIC'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sound of a GENERATOR STARTING. Nic switches on a light. It flickers and finally shines.

The house is orderly but cluttered: Furniture, knickknacks, various photos of Nic in Afghanistan (with Karzai, Massoud, Mujahadeen, US and Afghan soldiers). Afghan Paintings and rugs drape the walls. Two AK-47's stand in a corner.

Nic undresses himself, one piece at time. He goes to a sidebar, pours a drink...which he consumes on the spot. He pours another, walks to a laptop on a desk, wakes it. Also on the desk is a holstered Desert Eagle handgun.

Nic sits, drinks his vodka, thinks.

CUT TO:

BLACK. And then...

EXT. KABUL STREETS - DAY - SERIES OF SHOTS

SUBTITLE: ONE DAY LATER

The Toyota 4Runner from Nic's driveway zips through the streets of Kabul. The streets are clogged with insane traffic; roads are under-developed.

INT. 4RUNNER

Nic's alone and at the wheel, dressed casually but well. He has a small backpack/briefcase on the seat next to him.

After a short trip Nic pulls before an official-looking, secured building: High walls, razor wire, embankments, a government crest on the outside.

SUBTITLE: MINISTRY OF COUNTER-NARCOTICS, KABUL

The 4Runner pulls to a guarded gate checkpoint. MINISTRY GUARD #1 sees and recognizes Nic. Guard motions to MINISTRY GUARD #2, gate opens, 4Runner drives through.

INT. MINISTRY OF COUNTER-NARCOTICS

Nic, walking. Place is old with marble floors and nice but long-faded woodwork.

Nic is stopped in a long hall by a pair of MINISTRY GUARDS. They half-assedly search his bag, allow him through.

INT. NIC'S OFFICE

Nic enters his office. Tiny generic sign on the wall outside reads: MR. NICHOLAS JOHNSON, SENIOR ADVISOR. Nic moves to his desk, has a seat. The office is a small, dingy space that's incongruous with Nic's look and demeanor.

Nic opens a drawer and pulls a map of western Afghanistan, examines it. Couple beats later a young, professional-looking MINISTRY ASSISTANT, AZAR, 23, enters the office doorway, relaxes against the doorframe.

AZAR
(Afghan accent; flawless
English)
You're just too late.

NIC
Hey, Azar. Too late? How?

Nic continues to study his map and a few other papers.

AZAR
He's already left. Out meeting the
ISAF new guy. William called.

NIC
Yeah? Thanks. I'll handle it.

AZAR
Son-of-a-bitch, that guy.
(beat)
So, Zarar wants to know about the
Chishti Sharif. Anything?

NIC
Hopeful. I think there's a way.
Security is shit, though. Wild
West, mostly.

AZAR
How was the party?

NIC
Dead. What else would it be?

AZAR
Any delicious encounters I should
know about, in meticulous detail?

NIC
I'll tell you when you're 50.

AZAR
Hah! Need me for anything today,
Nic?

NIC
No. And since you were kind enough
to put all this ridiculous paper
together, I am, in fact, ready.

Nic stands, closes his desk drawer, walks over and faces
Azar, who is actually a bit taller than Nic.

NIC (CONT'D)
Thanks, Azar.

They shake.

AZAR
Whatever I can do.

NIC
Steak sandwich?

AZAR
(smiling)
Get out of here.

Nic exits.

AZAR (CONT'D)
Call if you need anything.

INT. BEECHCRAFT TURBOPROP AIRCRAFT - DAY

At altitude over Afghanistan. A few other PASSENGERS.

Nic reads some of his personal materials. Tired, he puts them aside and stares out at the vast Afghan landscape: Infinite, primal mountains and desert.

Nic settles in his seat, closes his eyes.

EXT. REMOTE AIRSTRIP - LASHGAR GAH - MID-DAY

The Beechcraft approaches a small airstrip, lands and drives to a stop. Heatwaves roil.

A FEW PASSENGERS debark via the plane's small set of stairs. Nic exits last. He squints into the sun. The AFGHAN PILOT hands him his bag.

PILOT
(facetiously)
Welcome to Lashgar Gah, my friend.
A paradise.

The pilot laughs. Nearby, a ONE-LEGGED AFGHAN BEGGAR limps on crutches, pleas to walking passengers. Nic rests his eyes on the beggar for a moment.

PILOT (CONT'D)

Watch out for landmines. Just ask
him if you don't believe me!
(laughs)

Nic looks across the tarmac, sees a MAN waving to him from a parked Land Cruiser. Nic steps off the paved tarmac and makes a beeline across a patch of dirt-packed ground.

Nic approaches the waving man, Hassan, a slender Afghan in his early 30's. Hassan wears traditional long shirt, shalwar drawstring pants, sandals.

HASSAN

(perfect English; Afghan
accent)

Ha! Mr. Nic!

NIC

Hassan!

Hassan shakes his hand heartily and reaches for his bag.

HASSAN

Yes! I did not know it was you
coming to Lashgar Gah until this
morning. How are you? You okay?

NIC

Great. You?

HASSAN

Yes, fine. So good to see you
again!

As Nic and Hassan approach the SUV, an AFGHAN GUARD with AK-47 gets out of the passenger seat and opens the back door for Nic. Hassan gets in the back on the other side, behind the Afghan driver.

NIC

When did you get here?

HASSAN

Two months ago. Our whole team.

NIC

Really? Lemme guess...

HASSAN

Ha! Yes. He will be surprised to see you.

NIC

I bet.

Nic closes his door.

INT. NIC'S LAND CRUISER - DAY

The Land Cruiser speeds and bumps closer to Lashgar Gah. Everyone in the Cruiser is lost in thought.

EXT. DESERT

The Land Cruiser drives through a sprawling Afghanistan vista, the outskirts of Lashgar Gah visible ahead.

INT. LAND CRUISER

The Land Cruiser suddenly slows. Nic looks up. Outside the vehicle are AFGHANS walking along the side of the road, in conservative dress: The women in burqas, the men in turbans, shalwars, beards. There are also donkeys, bicycles, carts.

Nic rolls down his window. He closes his eyes, enjoys the heat on his face, then opens his eyes, looks around.

The Cruiser slows to a crawl, several people give the unmarked vehicle suspicious eyes. Nic rolls the window up.

EXT. GOVERNMENT CHECKPOINT - DAY

The Land Cruiser creeps into a government checkpoint, assembled like an afterthought. PEOPLE milling about. Nic's Driver slows and stops. Just outside the vehicle, random uniformed ANA (AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY SOLDIERS) guard and pat-search Afghan men while scrutinizing ID's and passports.

Nic pays no mind. The SUV moves achingly forward again, Nic notices a little white tent ahead, to the side of the road. A few AFGHAN WOMEN in burqas stand in line to enter the tent.

As the Cruiser gets closer, the white structure is clearly not a tent, but some kind of curtained-off partition.

Various FEMALE ANA are seen directing the women in burqas behind the white curtain, single file.

The Land Cruiser stops. Just ahead, ANA #1 checks a RANDOM MALE DRIVER's ID and looks inside the man's car, while ANA #2 separates and approaches Nic's vehicle.

ANA #2 comes to the Land Cruiser's driver side, motions for the window to be rolled-down.

ANA #2
(Pashto)
ID.

NIC'S POV: He watches the white curtain and the women in burqas moving behind it. Yet another woman emerges from the opposite side of the curtain, adjusting her burqa. She's pointed back to the road by a female ANA.

BACK TO:

ANA #2 seems satisfied with Nic's Driver's ID, moves around to Hassan's side of the Land Cruiser as Hassan rolls his window down.

ANA #2 (CONT'D)
ID.

NIC'S POV: A sudden gust of wind blows the makeshift curtain off and away from its frame. In that moment, Nic sees SHAKEILA, 33, with her burqa up and over her head, revealing her face. She's getting searched by a female ANA.

This is an exceptionally beautiful woman, poised and elegant despite her circumstances. Her eyes and skin are flawless and simple, her demeanor calm. Search annoys her, however.

BACK TO:

NIC is mesmerized. He continues to observe Shakeila's search. After a couple beats she looks up and sees *him*. Both of them stare at one another, with Nic being a blank, and her somewhat irritated from his intrusion. She turns away.

On this, two male ANA frantically rush to restore the curtain, blocking all view of the women inside.

ANA #2 (CONT'D)
(to Nic, from Hassan's
window)
Passport?

Nic's expression fades. He seems phased from reality for a couple beats as he searches the scene and waits for Shakeila to appear on the opposite end of the curtain.

At Hassan's side of the vehicle, ANA #2 is tired of waiting. He opens Hassan's door.

ANA #2 (CONT'D)
(to Nic)
Hey! I'm not asking again.

Nic doesn't hear, but Hassan sees the Passport in Nic's breast pocket. He pulls it and hands it to ANA #2. The guard is visibly pissed, looks at Nic's passport slowly, rudely rifles the pages. Nic snaps-to, turns toward Hassan.

HASSAN
Hello?

NIC
Sorry.

ANA #2 seems finished with the passport, except...

ANA #2
Visa?

Nic motions for the passport. ANA #2 hands it back to Nic with a sour gaze. Nic finds the visa page, hands the passport back to the soldier. ANA #2 examines, looks at Nic suspiciously, stoically.

ANA #2 (CONT'D)
Stay here.

The soldier walks away and shows the passport to ANA #3, who shakes his head. ANA #3 then motions Nic's driver to pull off to the side.

Nic doesn't seem to give a damn, and instead watches the other side of the checkpoint in anticipation of seeing Shakeila again. The sound of a high-revving OS motorcycle engine breaks his concentration.

Nic turns and sees an AFGHAN TEENAGE BOY on a motorcycle, struggling to keep the engine from stalling: Each time he lets the revs fall, the engine sputters.

Nic nearly breaks a neck vertebrae as a figure enters the scene and approaches the boy: Shakeila. She's now completely covered in her distinctive burqa.

Nic's eyes travel down along the folds of Shakeila's burqa to her feet, the only part of her body uncovered. The straps of her sandals press gently into her flesh, her toes are meticulously painted a lush, scarlet red.

A sudden knock on Nic's window. ANA #2 has returned. He motions for the window, Nic rolls it down.

ANA #2 (CONT'D)
 You must get this renewed as soon
 as possible. Next time you might
 not be so lucky.

The soldier belligerently tosses the passport back to Nic and motions for the CHECKPOINT GUARD to pass them through.

AMA #2
 Boro!

EXT. ROADSIDE

The boy's motorcycle has died and he tries in vain to start it. Shakeila stands there with him, waiting.

INT. LAND CRUISER

Nic's vehicle eases back onto the road, and is now directly beside the stalled motorcycle. Nic watches the scene. Shakeila suddenly looks Nic's way, her eyes ever so slightly visible through the veil of the burqa.

The boy continues to try the motorcycle. It won't start.

NIC
 (to Driver)
 Stop.

The Driver gives a quick, puzzled look at Nic in the rearview, but does as ordered.

EXT. CHECKPOINT ROADSIDE

Nic gets out of the Land Cruiser and walks up to the motorcycle. He motions for the boy to climb off.

Everyone (including guards) watches as Nic gets on the kid's bike, tries to start. No good. Nic makes a very astute adjustment to the carb, and kick starts the engine. It roars to life.

Nic gets off the bike, offers it back to the boy. Shakeila ignores Nic totally, moves around the bike and sits on the back. The boy looks at Nic in a sort of confused and slightly intimidated manner. He mounts the bike, revs it, he and Shakeila drive away.

As they do, Shakeila turns back and looks directly at Nic for a beat.

HASSAN (OS
I have an old Mustang you can work
on next!

Nic turns and smiles.

ANA #2
(to Nic)
Hey!

The guard motions for Nic to get the hell back in the Land Cruiser. He does, the Cruiser pulls away.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Land Cruiser alone speeds down a desolate highway.

INT. LAND CRUISER

As the vehicle rounds a slight corner, the motorcycle carrying Shakeila and the boy is seen a few hundred meters ahead. Nic notices. Also becoming visible is some sort of structure to the side of the road, a prison-like compound.

EXT. HIGHWAY

The motorcycle passes a road that turns toward the compound. Nic's Land Cruiser enters frame, slows, then turns from the highway and drives down the little side road. In a few dozen feet, the Cruiser stops.

INT. CRUISER

Nic watches Shakeila and the boy as they speed from view down the highway. Nic turns back to his windshield view.

Outside the Land Cruiser are a pair of armed AFGHAN PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS, who protect the entrance of a fortified military-esque compound. The compound has 20' concrete walls topped in barbed and razor wire. Sandbagged guard towers overlook each corner.

One of the guards motions the Cruiser forward.

EXT. USAID COMPOUND GATE/COURTYARD

Nic's vehicle pulls through a security gate, enters the fortified compound. The place is stark, with a few Afghan security PERSONNEL milling about.

The Cruiser stops, Nic and Hassan exit, walk toward a door of the largest visible building. They enter.

INT. USAID COMPOUND

Inside this generic building a huge banner reads: *"USAID LICIT LIVELIHOODS PROGRAM,"* with a large USAID logo underneath. A separate logo of a poppy plant with a red "anti" line through it is also displayed.

Nic and Hassan watch as four AFGHAN WORKERS appear, carrying two occupied body bags.

STAN (OS)

Courtesy of the Taliban. Beautiful,
isn't it?

Nic and Hassan turn to see a very fit American, STAN, 54, walking toward them, arms crossed. He's in Khaki and button-down shirt, with every corner and crease perfectly pressed.

The four Afghans with the body bags exit. Stan stops, leans on a wall, studies Nic and Hassan with zero expression.

STAN (CONT'D)

Nic, what the hell you doin' here?

NIC

Very warm, Stan.

STAN

What are you doin' here, Nic?

NIC

Organic Eradication. Heard of it?
Or do you just sit around and whack
to porn all day?

STAN

Organic Eradication. Jesus H, what
will they think of next? And what
you got against porn?

(nods toward Hassan)

One-man security? Good luck with
that. What do you want?

NIC

I need to meet with the Governor as
soon as possible.

STAN

You'd like that, wouldn't you?

NIC

I require it. You and your boys are
here as *guests* of the Afghan
government, which I happen to
represent at this particular
moment. So, your cooperation is
mandatory, though, of course,
deeply appreciated.

STAN

Wow. Really?

NIC

Look, can we not fuck around?

STAN

Nic, if I wanna fuck with you, I
will. Try and do something.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

(beat)
Kidding.

Stan stares him down a few beats, then turns and walks the opposite direction. Nic smiles at Hassan, motions with his head to follow.

Nic and Hassan follow Stan, moving toward an office entrance, with a sign outside: "*STAN REARDON, CHIEF OF PARTY*".

INT. STAN'S OFFICE

They all enter Stan's "Dickensian" office, and have a seat, Stan behind his desk, Nic facing him, Hassan slightly off to the side.

NIC
Nice place.

STAN
Like it? We never leave the compound anymore. Insurance won't cover it.

Stan tosses a file to Nic. The cover reads: "*The Noorzai Hierarchy*". Nic opens the file, flips and scans through it: Photos, names, a profile of "*MUSSAH KHAN NOORZAI*".

STAN (CONT'D)
Mr. real Governor Mussah Khan plays both sides of the poppy. He knows where money is.

NIC
Typical. You know him?

STAN
He's been here a few times.
For tea.

Nic examines charts and maps. He gets to the end of the file papers, shuffles 'em back together, hands it all to Hassan.

NIC
Do your guys have any farmer connections? If Khan's not a player, I'd like to go direct.

Stan observes Nic for a coupe beats, then opens his desk drawer. He produces some kind of triplicate form, turns it Nic's direction and holds a pen at ready.

STAN

This releases myself and this fine establishment, i.e., USAID, from any and all liability for your untimely death, should it occur outside these walls. Don't sign it? You don't leave.

NIC

Can I expect your help with the farmers if necessary, yes or no?

STAN

Thrilled to help, Nic. Anything for a *Company* boy.

NIC

I'm not *Company* anymore, Stan.

STAN

Didn't know it worked that way. Kinda thought it was like the *Mafia*.

(*pronounced Maff-E'Uh*)

NIC

Never heard *that* before.

(he signs)

What happened to the guys in the bags, by the way?

STAN

IED got 'em. Two of my best ANA eradicators. Went off-script lookin' around a restricted village, Taliban wasn't happy.

Nic stands as does Hassan. Stan remains seated.

STAN (CONT'D)

One was still alive when we found him. They popped him straight in the nose. Blew the back of his head off, of course. Brains were just hanging out, down and around.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

No idea how he managed to live.
Thoughts were a little scrambled,
though.

Nic turns and leaves, Hassan follows.

NIC

Let you know if I need anything.

STAN

Outstanding. Bye, now.

EXT. LAND CRUISER - DAY

Nic's Land Cruiser drives a brand new paved road in the middle of a totally empty desert. A sign reads: "USAID: Gift of the American People".

INT. LAND CRUISER

Hassan drives. No extra security this time. Nic sits in the passenger seat, scans the desert outside.

HASSAN

Only paved road in the region and
it leads right to the Governor's
house. Total accident.

(small laughing)

Governor has two wives, you know. I
hear one is very fat.

NIC

Which one cooks?

HASSAN

I do not know. The Governor is a
very strict in Pashtunwali. We will
never see his wives. But who knows?
Perhaps we will get lucky and catch
one of them outside, beating a rug.
Skinny one, I hope.

(laughs, settles)

Hot today. You know Nic, I was
thinking about those dead guys back
there.

Nic pulls an apple out of his pack.

NIC
Want an apple?

HASSAN
(shakes his head)
You think the dead still had eyes?

NIC
Don't know. Why?

Nic takes a bite of the apple.

HASSAN
Just something I was thinking. And
I was also thinking about their
families. And children.

Nic takes another bite.

NIC
Might not have any.

HASSAN
No family? Bah. Every man has
family. Even you.

NIC
If you say so.
(points outside)
There.

Hassan slows, turns off the highway and onto a dirt road.

TIME CUT:

EXT. GOVERNOR MUSSAH KHAN'S COMPOUND - AFTERNOON

The Land Cruiser approaches a very large compound in a
dramatic, irrigated agricultural valley. The Cruiser passes
through the large front gate into...

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND COURTYARD

Simple adobe buildings, a Hojra (guest house), a mosque, and
scattered small homes. Near it all is the main house, a much
larger building.

Hassan parks, he and Nic get out. As they walk toward the main house Nic notices another building connected to the compound, next to the Hojra. Building has a crudely painted medical cross.

Dadullah (from the roadside bombing), ALEMZAIB, 16, and another COMPOUND AFGHAN, 28, sit laconically on mats outside the Hojra, picking debris from between their toes.

Dadullah eyes Nic and Hassan warily. Alemzaib is an attractive, very effeminate young man wearing Khol (eye makeup), fancy cap, long bangs, henna on his hands. The three males AD LIB among themselves in Pashto, making little jokes with Alemzaib.

Dadullah motions Nic and Hassan to come that way, they walk toward him. Dadullah rudely pushes Alemzaib aside, to make room on the mat.

Dadullah laughs at Alemzaib, who gets up and walks to the door of the inner compound, knocks. An unseen guard lets him in. Nic and Hassan seat themselves on the mat.

DADULLAH

(Pashto; to Hassan)

Welcome!

(points at Nic)

Where does he come from? He is a brave man to come here. Isn't he afraid we will cut off his head and fuck him in the ass?

Dadullah and the Compound Afghan laugh.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

But, he is safe here. As long as a man stays in our house we must protect him with our lives. That is good Pashtunwali!

Hassan says nothing; Dadullah is immediately perturbed.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

Translate it for the foreigner!

HASSAN

(to Nic; in English)

He says you are brave to come here.

Dadullah flings another bit of toe jam into the yard. A metal gate squeaks open and Alemzaib walks through carrying a tray of nuts, Afghan sweets, and tea. He carefully sets the tray down, pours cups of tea and hands them around.

Nic sips his tea. Alemzaib stares at Nic and flirtingly demonstrates that Nic should eat some sweets. Nic obliges, making Alemzaib happy.

Dadullah laughs and Alemzaib blushes. Alemzaib is about to speak when the metal gate opens again and GOVERNOR MUSSAH KHAN walks out.

Everyone rises.

Khan is a tall, elegant man wearing the white turban of a Muslim scholar. Round glasses. He walks over directly to Nic, shakes his hand.

MUSSAH KHAN
(in English)
Hello. I am sorry for the delay.

NIC
(in Pashto)
Thank you for seeing me. Your men
have been most gracious in
welcoming us.

Nic looks toward Dadullah, who betrays no sign that he is very surprised about Nic speaking Pashto.

MUSSAH KHAN
Ah, you speak Pashto! That is rare.
Most foreigners don't learn our
language. Come.

Khan motions for Nic to enter the Hojra. Nic takes his tea and walks inside with Khan. The others wait.

INT. HOJRA

Alemzaib carries the tray inside and places it on a table. Nic and Khan then sit there, across from each other.

MUSSAH KHAN
(switching to English)
How were your travels?

NIC

Peaceful.

Alemzaib stands at the doorway behind Mussah Khan and stares at Nic. Khan motions to Alemzaib to leave the Hojra. Alemzaib hesitates, looks at Nic, then leaves.

MUSSAH KHAN

How can I assist you?

NIC

I want to visit some of the villages, in your province.

MUSSAH KHAN

Why?

NIC

Poppy. As you know, we'd like to talk about new—

MUSSAH KHAN

Ha! Burning poppy?! That has been tried before. And your US military has made many enemies here. The people are fed up with them.

NIC

I understand. But I was sent by the Afghan government. So, I work for you. And this program is an entirely different approach.

MUSSAH KHAN

You work for our Ministry, true, but you are foreign. And as for the government, they are no better than thieves. Corruption and lies.

NIC

It's not good right now, yes. But, we can make it better. Some in the government only want the best for Afghanistan. It's important to help those people. I believe in that. That's why I'm here.

MUSSAH KHAN

Bah. They line their pockets with your "beliefs".

Khan drinks his tea, eyes Nic with deep consideration.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

My province is dangerous. The people do not know the difference between military and civilian. To them, you from the US are *all* foreign, and invaders. In truth, perhaps you are. How can we know?

NIC

Governor, the Ministry doesn't want to just burn poppy fields. That's not the idea. It wants to stay involved in the rural communities, and yes, this will require *friendly* foreign support: Money, men, materials. It's long term, though. There have to be alternatives to poppy and corruption. And death.

MUSSAH KHAN

True. But, there will be resistance. Poppy is power. The Haqqani network gets rich from everything connected to poppy. And they are not alone.

NIC

I know. It's unfortunate.

(beat)

Now, the Ministry is calling this program *Organic Eradication*. First phase is material support while destroying the poppy crops.

MUSSAH KHAN

Nic, this is impossible.

Nic's frustration shows, subtly. He re-tools his approach.

NIC

Under normal circumstances, yes.
That's why the Ministry and the
Kabul government itself needs your
personal support. That will change
the "problem" into something
everyone can work with. In exchange
for your sizable influence with
local authorities, they're willing
to discuss an important post for
you in primary regional government.

Khan considers these words...and the high-level offer.

MUSSAH KHAN

What makes you think I would want
to join those snakes in Kabul?

NIC

It's a chance, just a chance, that
you could genuinely help your own
people, and become self-sufficient.

On this, the door to the Hojra bursts open. It's Alemzaib. He
carries food on three plates, one with rice, another with
lamb shank, and another with kabob, rice, and Afghan bread.

Hassan, Dadullah, and Dadullah's men enter the Hojra. They
take their seats around the table, as Mussah Khan hands a
plate to Nic.

MUSSAH KHAN

Let us eat, Nic.

Dadullah sits directly opposite Nic, as if to keep an eye on
him. Nic nods, Dadullah does not respond...but then smiles.

Hassan sits next to Nic. Alemzaib appears bearing a separate
tray for Khan and sits down on the other side of him. Khan
notices that Alemzaib's hands are dyed in henna now.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

(whispering to Alemzaib,
in Pashto)

Oooh. They look good.

Khan turns his attention to Nic, speaking in Pashto.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
We will take you to the villages,
as you request.

Nic hides his surprise, barely. But Dadullah's mood darkens.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
You are the only American who has
ever come to visit me. Usually,
they want me to come to them, in
their fancy wire compounds, living
in tin cans.
(to Dadullah)
In the morning, you will accompany
these men to the villages. And
tonight, they are guests.

Dadullah looks surprised. He gets up quickly and leaves.

NIC
Thank you, Governor. We greatly
appreciate your hospitality and
cooperation.

MUSSAH KHAN
Dadullah will escort you to your
chambers. You may stay here as long
as you need. A week, a month. You
will be welcomed guests.

NIC
Thank you, sir. Very much.

Hassan and Nic get up to leave. A motorcycle is heard OS. Nic
walks to the door, looks out.

EXT. COMPOUND COURTYARD

The motorcycle that Nic fixed at the checkpoint arrives and
stops, with the boy still driving. On the seat behind the boy
is a WOMAN in a burqa who's hunched over, clutching her
abdomen in obvious distress. The boy gets off the motorcycle
and helps the woman walk into the clinic.

INT. HOJRA

MUSSAH KHAN
That is the women's medical clinic.

Dadullah suddenly returns to scene, attracted by the motorcycle. He looks toward the clinic with keen interest, and gives Nic a dirty gaze as well. Mussah Khan motions to Dadullah. He understands.

Hassan and Nic exit, walk to their vehicle. Dadullah follows.

EXT. COMPOUND COURTYARD

Nic, Hassan, and Dadullah casually cross the grounds when several large vehicles approach OS. One by one the vehicles enter the Khan gate: Three blacked-out USAID armored SUVs.

Nic looks at Hassan, who has no clue. On this, Mussah Khan exits the Hojra, with two AIDES. Khan's clearly expecting the SUVs. He walks toward them as they pull to a stop.

Various SECURITY DETAIL exit the SUVs, and among them is William, looking crisp and clean. William looks around, sees Nic, waves. Nic, playing along, waves back.

NIC
(to Hassan)
What the *hell* is this?

Khan and William meet in the courtyard, shake hands with familiarity. They speak MOS, Khan points to Nic. William smiles his direction, shakes hands again with Khan, who then gestures widely and AD LIBS commands his aides, who scurry back to the Hojra.

William walks directly to Nic. All smiles.

WILLIAM
Looks like we made that meeting
after all.

NIC
Just for me, huh?

WILLIAM
Chatting with the governor about
things. Two birds, right? Shall we?

William gestures toward the Hojra, he and Nic walk that way. Hassan attempts to follow, but Nic dissuades him with a shake of his head.

TIME CUT:

INT. HOJRA - DAY

William and Nic sit facing one another in hard profile. The table has food and tea; one of Khan's aides attends.

NIC
(not happy)
Entirely unacceptable.

William considers Nic for a couple beats, then looks down at a plate of dried fruit.

WILLIAM
How are those?

Nic gives the plate a glance.

NIC
So-so.

William reaches over, takes a piece of fruit from the plate, chews it. And then...

WILLIAM
You're right. Nic, we have to move before it gets worse down there. I know you know it.

NIC
Right. But this is not how you do it. Especially in the South. Especially not around Musa Kala.

WILLIAM
Two days ago, eleven Afghan police officers left their unit and joined the Taliban. And that's just one example. It's falling down there, Nic. Sooner or later it's North, and then what?

NIC
William, if the US goes into Musa Kala, wipes-out the poppy, wipes-out the Taliban, and then fucking *stays*, the people there will absolutely revolt.

WILLIAM

That's why I need you. You know the political lay of the land down there better than anyone.

NIC

I don't think that's true. Besides, I'm in the middle of a job here.

(beat)

Does Khan know what you're up to?

WILLIAM

The Governor wants to put a lid on the Haqqani, and he also needs Chagai to stop fucking up his province. So, yes, he's very much open to terms, and he's *exploring solutions* with us. But when the time comes, you're my ace of spades, Nic. Sure as night.

NIC

Wait. Okay, lemme get this: If he helps, you go in. If he don't help, you go in. You guys are pricks.

WILLIAM

And what's that make you?

NIC

Happy I'm out. Bastards.

WILLIAM

Yeah, right. Look, you're making this harder than it is. We need to plug the hole down there, once and for all. And then we finally have a real, clear platform into Pakistan. It's important.

NIC

You'll never seal that border. Ever. And the press is gonna shit all over Company stuff. Big time. How does that help, William? How?

WILLIAM

Seventh Floor have PR covered, if it comes to that.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

The media back home is shit-ignorant, anyway. Might have some worries with Al Jazeera and the BBC, but nothing we can't handle.

William grabs another piece of fruit, chews it.

NIC

Fucking mess.

WILLIAM

Blame the poppy, Nic. Blame the Russians. Kinda karmic they got themselves such a huge heroin problem right now, ain't it?

(smiles hard)

Nic, the outside world sends billions in aid here. Every year. They expect results. The country *has* to have order. We can't *bring* order, or *bring* infrastructure or advancements by allowing the Goddamned Haqqani and Taliban to slide around under our nose, coming and going as they please.

NIC

Our nose? So, it's *your* country now. Aid money. Right. Fucking joke. Every one of these asshole politicians over here are getting fat off your "aid money". And guess what the people get? Poor.

WILLIAM

It's fucked. But these people and their ass-backward culture are simply not my problem. My job is to keep the stink where it lives. Nic, you're gonna do this thing I ask. Know why? Because if you don't, I'll find somebody who will. Someone perhaps not so in love with the Bronze Age.

Nic stares at William with a blank and distant look.

NIC

I really despise you, William. Not just for Laura, but because you're just a soulless son-of-a-bitch with DC's arm so far up your ass you can barely see the shoulder.

WILLIAM

Appreciate the compliment. You turned your back on Laura. And your kid. Wasn't my fault. You wanted the other side of the world, Nic. And you got it. Best thing to do is just...live with it.

They burn at each other a couple beats.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

What's your answer?

NIC

I'll let you know.

William stands. He takes another piece of fruit, chews it.

WILLIAM

These really do taste like shit. Be in touch. Soon.

William turns and exits. Nic sits with his thoughts.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERTS - DAWN - SERIES OF SHOTS

Flat expanses covered in daybreak. Tranquil and silent.

A couple beats, and then three SUV's speed through scene, Nic's being the second in line. The thirds SUV tows a pair of ATV's on a trailer.

A little later in the morning and the trio enters a canyon, zips quickly through. They exit, emerging into a fertile opium growing valley in full bloom. POPPY FARMERS stare as the vehicles pass; children play nearby. A baby cries as the vehicle dust engulfs her. A group of LITTLE AFGHAN GIRLS stare at the SUV's, and then run away.

EXT. VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

The SUV's race into a rural village and come to a stop at the mosque. The VILLAGE ELDERS, four of them—each in traditional but individual garb—stand waiting.

Dadullah and his two men emerge from the front vehicle, Nic and Hassan get out of the second vehicle, two ANA soldiers exit the third. Dadullah and the other Afghans approach and embrace the village elders. Hassan and Nic join them and they all go into the village hall, next to the mosque.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

An ATV driven by an ANA soldier roars through a poppy field, violently breaks a path through the stalks. Another soldier follows on foot, setting the field afire as he goes.

Dadullah, his men, Nic, Hassan, and the village chiefs stand on the sideline watching the smoldering and burning field. Everyone's all smiles, except for Nic, who taps Hassan, moves off and away from the group.

HASSAN
Something wrong, Nic?

NIC
This was too easy.

HASSAN
Nic, relax! You always expect the worst. But sometimes, sometimes it's the best. Yes?

NIC
I don't know. Alright, let's eat.

HASSAN
You see? Back to normal already!

NIC
Yeah.

They walk back toward the others.

EXT. FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

In shadows of late day, the ANA soldiers pack the ATV's. Nic's entire party is assembled around the SUV's, some entering the vehicles, some outside smoking or drinking tea.

In the BG the vast poppy field from earlier has been burned and razed by more than half. Nic sips tea, studies the scene.

EXT. MUSSAH KHAN COMPOUND - NIGHT

The party's three SUV's pull into the compound and park. Everyone exits, Dadullah AD LIBs to a couple of the other Afghans then moves off toward his own domicile.

Alemzaib emerges from the Hojra, hovers in the BG watching Nic and Hassan pull their bags from the SUV.

Sound of a motorcycle approaching: All turn to see the boy again, this time rapidly driving into the compound with a burqa-clad figure on the back, barely hanging on.

The motorcycle brakes, but then wobbles from the unbalanced weight. The boy is forced to lay the bike on its side, pinning himself and the woman. Nic and Hassan run over and lift the motorcycle. Hassan kickstands it, Nic assists the woman into the clinic as the boy follows. Alemzaib follows as well, looks around warily.

INT. CLINIC

Sparse and clean. A NURSE is here, busy doing some paperwork and with her back to the doorway. She has her burqa pulled above her face, but when she hears the group enter she quickly pulls the burqa back down. She turns around, moves toward them.

Nic and Hassan help the ailing woman to a bench. The nurse arrives, Hassan motions to Nic that they should leave. Nic turns to leave but first turns back to the boy.

NIC

What's your name?

SIDDIQ

Siddiq. What's yours?

NIC

Nic. How's the motorcycle?

The ailing woman suddenly groans in pain. They all turn to see and then another woman in a burqa appears, this one with an air of authority.

Nic's eyes find the new woman's feet, and he sees the brilliant scarlet toenails from the checkpoint. Nic is frozen solid, completely rooted. He watches as the woman in the red polish kneels to examine the ailing patient. She's obviously the clinic's doctor.

In what sounds like AD LIB profanity, the doctor lifts her burqa above her head to examine the patient. And, indeed, it's Shakeila from earlier.

SHAKEILA

(to the nurse, in Pashto)

What do we have left to give her?

NURSE

Nothing but cold tablets.

SHAKEILA

Get them.

The nurse leaves, Shakeila puts her hand on the suffering woman's forehead. She takes out a thermometer and puts it in the woman's mouth.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

No, don't eat it! Put it under your tongue.

(to Siddiq; motioning to

Nic and Hassan)

Get them out, please.

Siddiq reluctantly turns to face Nic and Hassan.

SIDDIQ

She says you must go, Mr. Nic.

Shakeila looks right at Nic now: Nic's mesmerized in the same way as the checkpoint.

SHAKEILA

(in English)

Men are not allowed in here.

Especially not *foreign* men.

NIC
(in Pashto)
You are the doctor?

Shakeila looks quite surprised that Nic spoke Pashto, and she quickly pulls the burqa down over her face. Then she helps the sick woman up.

SHAKEILA
(to the nurse)
Give her the tablets.

The nurse gives the sick woman the tablets and some water. As Shakeila helps the woman out of the room, she stops and turns around to look at Nic. Then she continues, disappearing down a hallway. Nic stares after her.

HASSAN
Let's go before someone sees.

They open the door slowly. Alemzaib is standing at watch, just outside the door. He motions for them to exit; they do.

EXT. COMPOUND COURTYARD - NIGHT

Nic, Hassan, and Alemzaib move toward the Hojra.

NIC
Alemzaib. Thanks for looking out.

HASSAN
He doesn't understand English.

Khan suddenly approaches, his spirits high. Alemzaib detaches from Nic and Hassan, moves to Khan's side.

MUSSAH KHAN
It was successful today?

NIC
The village chiefs are happy, and we're happy. Thank you.

MUSSAH KHAN
(laughing)
Everybody happy! But organic things generally make Afghans very happy, indeed. You will want to go to another village tomorrow?

NIC

Yes.

MUSSAH KHAN

Very good. Come with me, Nic.

Mussah Khan takes Nic's hand and they walk away from Hassan and Alemzaib.

EXT. COMPOUND GARDEN - NIGHT

Nic and Khan walk through the gardens at the edge of the compound, a semi-lush installation.

MUSSAH KHAN

This is my favorite place here. The earth is good to us. Come.

Khan leads Nic up some stairs to one of the guard towers.

EXT. GUARD TOWER

At the top of the stairs, the TOWER GUARD here quickly moves out of the way and allows Nic and Khan to take his position.

It's a nighttime panorama; Nic and Khan examine the expanse of lush river land beyond the compound, which is surrounded by desert. The river sparkles in the light from the heavens.

MUSSAH KHAN

My family made the land fertile.
Otherwise, just worthless desert.
See down there? Pistachios. Almonds
over there. Those trees? Apricots.
God has blessed my people.

NIC

Governor, a couple days ago, near Herat, I saw a pair of Talib put a girl in front of a tree and kill her. A girl.

MUSSAH KHAN

And of course you would like for governors such as myself to eliminate the ways of Pashtunwali.

NIC

I didn't say that, but—

MUSSAH KHAN

You have your concerns, I have mine. For example, it is fine to destroy poppy now, but what plans do Kabul and Americans have to protect the farms once replanted?

NIC

Well, I know there's a proposal in place to leave some form of security, for a year or so.

MUSSAH KHAN

And then after the year?

From his hesitation and tone, this was not the question Nic wanted to hear.

NIC

You're on your own. Not my idea.
Not a good idea. But that's it.

Khan considers. He looks out over the orchards.

MUSSAH KHAN

What do you know about the situation in Musa Kala?

This catches Nic off guard. He thinks for a moment.

NIC

Renegade. No border protection at all. Natural path for smugglers.

MUSSAH KHAN

Yes, it is a problem.

NIC

Why do you ask?

MUSSAH KHAN

Perhaps just thinking out loud.

Khan turns and faces Nic, squarely and sternly. He examines Nic with no expression.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

You Westerners offer much. But in truth you offer little, at high cost.

NIC

We're not perfect.

Khan turns to Nic and grasps his arms warmly, motions him toward the stairs.

MUSSAH KHAN

(to the guard)

Allow him here anytime he wishes.
Tell the others.

(to Nic)

It's sometimes a good place to think. And you strike me as a man with much on his mind.

They descend the stairs together.

EXT. CLINIC - NIGHT

Siddiq sits on his motorcycle with engine idling. Shakeila, in full burqa, exits the clinic and gets on the back of Siddiq's motorcycle. The bike drives away.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Siddiq and Shakeila drive down the highway.

EXT. AFGHAN VILLAGE - NIGHT

The crescent moon sits in the sky over this Afghan village of small, one-story flat roof adobe homes.

The moonlight covers the dirt yard of an adobe house at the edge of the village. A couple of windows are illuminated. The subtle sound of children's voices singing an AFGHAN FOLK SONG comes from one of the windows.

Siddiq and Shakeila arrive on the motorcycle. Siddiq parks the bike, they both enter the adobe.

INT. SHAKEILA'S HOME

Warm and comfortable. MARINA, Shakeila's ten year-old daughter, cooks dinner. Marina's brother, Siddiq, walks over and pushes her out of the way to grab a piece of fresh bread. He goes and sits down on the floor.

Shakeila hurries into the room, removing her burqa at the same time. With it off, we see her clearly and fully.

SHAKEILA

How was school Marina-jan?

MARINA

The teacher did not show up.

SHAKEILA

Again?!

MARINA

A man came when the teacher did not show and told us all to go home and not come back.

SHAKEILA

What man?! You are missing more school days than you are attending!

MARINA

Momma, I tried to do the reading by myself, but I could not.

SHAKEILA

I will help you after dinner. You must keep up with your school work. Your brother will help.

Shakeila gets up and walks to the kitchen.

SHAKEILA (OS) (CONT'D)

Tomorrow morning you will come to the clinic with me, Marina.

Marina lights up at the prospect.

EXT. USAID COMPOUND GATE/COURTYARD - MORNING

Nic's vehicle pulls through the fortified entrance, comes to a stop and parks. Nic exits, looks around. He sees a woman in a burqa walking in the BG, and stops to observe her.

NIC'S POV: HER TOENAILS, unpainted.

BACK TO: Nic, smiling to himself. He walks away.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Nic sits in Stan's office. Stan is on his feet, stands looking out his window. A few beats go by.

STAN

(doesn't look at Nic)

Sorry, Nic, but I don't want you
anywhere near Musa Kala. Don't care
who it's for. Insurance, politics:
Too much to deal with.

NIC

First of all, nothing's decided.
But if and when, just need a little
support from your side. That's all.
William's handling the heavy stuff.
I'd be laying...groundwork.

Stan turns and sits at his desk. He puts his feet up.

STAN

Nic, let me put this another way.
Fuck you. Ain't no way in hell's
green grass I'm risking my people,
my equipment, my time, for you. You
work for the *Afghans*, partner. I
work for the United States.

Nic burns from Stan's attitude. He's had it.

NIC

In case you hadn't noticed, we're
all kinda in the same boat out
here. Musa Kala is everyone's
problem. It's not going away.

STAN

I get paid either way, Nic, so I
couldn't really give a fuck.

Nic stands, looks at Stan very stoically.

NIC

William will call. Soon. He'll ask
for certain things, to help my
work. You'll provide them. You so
much as pick up the phone on the
wrong ring, I call the State
Department. Enough's enough. Do
your job; stop bein' a prick. Okay,
forget the last part, that's
impossible. If it's any
consolation, when it's all said and
done you'll be a hero for at least
a week.

STAN

Oh, really? And then what?

Nic turns and walks out the door.

INT. USAID HALLWAY

Nic walks. When he reaches the place where the Afghans had
earlier carried body bags, he stops, gets an idea.

INT. INFIRMARY

Nic enters, casually. Nobody's here save some INDECIPHERABLE
SHAPES of personnel behind office windows on the other side.

Nic checks around, starts opening drawers and doors. He sees
something, looks around stealthy, and grabs the item: A large
medical bag. He opens it. Fully stocked.

Nic closes the doors, leaves with the bag.

EXT. TOWN MARKET - DAY

A sea of WOMEN in blue burqas with CHILDREN running around
their feet. VENDORS in stands line the street. Furniture sits
next to mounds of herbs, popcorn, tea leaves, and blankets
neatly stacked.

The women are all indistinguishable from one-another, except for their sandals or shoes. Some even wear high heels with beautifully painted toes.

Hassan's Land Cruiser moves slowly through the hectic market, Nic in the passenger seat. Nic looks for something, sees a small adobe store with a sign in Pashto: "Pharmacy." Nic motions Hassan to stop.

INT. PHARMACY

Nic browses the tiny, cramped aisles of medicines and sundries. He pulls a few items seeming at random, until he sees a rack of nail polish. He looks at the bottles, finds one that's extreme scarlet red. He smiles, grabs the bottle, examines it. He walks off.

INT. KHAN WOMAN'S CLINIC - LATE AFTERNOON

Shakeila and the nurse are here, Shakeila with burqa pulled over her head and face exposed. She busily looks through numerous empty bottles on a shelf, writes notes on a little pad as she goes.

SHAKEILA

Nothing! We have nothing here! How
are we supposed to work this way?
Not even iodine!

She slams her little note pad, stares at the counter-top in frustration. Something occurs to her.

Shakeila exits.

EXT. COMPOUND - DAY

Siddiq is here, cleaning his motorcycle. Shakeila (with burqa still over her head) walks quickly across the yard and bangs on the door to the main gate. Alemzaib is on the other side, and he opens it.

ALEMZAIB

What is it, Shakeila-jan?

SHAKEILA

I need to see him!

ALEMZAIB

He is meeting with the men.

SHAKEILA

I need to see him.

Alemzaib looks around, motions for her to follow. He walks away, she follows him to the main house.

INT. MAIN HOUSE

Mussah Khan finishes prayer, is sitting on the floor with two of his men. He looks up to see Alemzaib and Shakeila enter.

MUSSAH KHAN

Dear one! What is the matter?

SHAKEILA

I need to speak with you.

MUSSAH KHAN

Of course.

(to the men)

Leave us.

The two leave, Khan motions for Shakeila to sit next to him. She does, he pours tea for her.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

Now, what is it, my dear?

SHAKEILA

We have no medicine in the clinic. Nothing. If we get a serious patient, it will be very bad. You told me weeks ago that you would bring medicine and supplies.

MUSSAH KHAN

Soon, my dear. Don't worry. And how are your wedding preparations?

Shakeila gets very dark.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

You can't avoid this forever.

SHAKEILA

I miss my husband. My *real* husband.

MUSSAH KHAN

Wahid has been dead four full years. It is time to live again.

SHAKEILA

No, I loved only your brother. Marrying a man I do not love is not living. It's a curse.

MUSSAH KHAN

Yes, you can no longer accept our ways. Even after 10 years you are not fitting here. You were poisoned by the West.

SHAKEILA

I was not poisoned! I left to study. I am a doctor. It is what I am, who I am. I decide, not you, not...any man!

MUSSAH KHAN

When my brother was alive and running the clinic, you served at his pleasure. Now, you serve at mine. A woman can accomplish much, if led by a husband. Soon, when you are married again, everything will be as Allah desires. Be faithful to Allah, Shakeila-jan, and all else will follow.

At that moment Dadullah appears in the doorway. He looks uncomfortable. Shakeila sees him, immediately gets up and walks by him.

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND - SUNSET

Nic and Hassan have arrived. They pull their bags from the Land Cruiser.

An angry and flustered Shakeila opens the metal gate leading to the interior compound, not even bothering to cover her face when she sees Nic and Hassan.

SHAKEILA

Siddiq! We're going home! Boro!

Siddiq gets on his motorcycle. At first it won't start, but then he fiddles with a knob like Nic did and the engine fires immediately. Shakeila gets on the seat behind him. She looks at Nic and Hassan as she and Siddiq drive out the compound.

On this, Dadullah walks out of the gate that leads to the inside of the compound and gives Nic a hard look. Dadullah walks forward and past Nic and Hassan, looks for Shakeila.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK

Siddiq and Shakeila drive quickly through the twilight. In a couple beats, Siddiq notices headlights in his mirror, quickly approaching from behind. He looks back, it's a black Land Cruiser.

The vehicle approaches but does not pass. It hovers around behind them, too close for safety.

Siddiq drives faster. Soon, the bike's maximum is reached and the Land Cruiser won't let up.

And then suddenly, the Land Cruiser falls back. It quickly recedes into the distance.

Siddiq and Shakeila drive on.

EXT. HOJRA/CLINIC - MORNING

The compound stirs to life in the morning light.

Outside the Hojra, Nic and Hassan sit in chairs, sunning themselves and having tea. They're already showered and dressed for the day, and seem to be waiting for something.

Siddiq, Shakeila and Marina drive up on the motorcycle. Nic watches as Shakeila dismounts, walks into the clinic with Siddiq. Marina stays outside, where she grabs a little broom and sweeps the front yard.

As if on cue, Nic looks at Hassan then gets up and walks out of scene for a moment. He quickly returns with the found medical bag, which seems much heavier by the way he's carrying. He walks to Marina, Hassan stays put.

NIC

(Pashto)

Hello. How are you?

(MORE)

NIC (CONT'D)

(she's shy; says nothing)

What is your name?

An engine is heard OS. Nic looks toward the road and sees Dadullah's Cruiser approaching.

NIC (CONT'D)

Shit.

Marina suddenly grabs Nic's hand and pulls him toward the clinic. He quickly goes into the clinic with Marina.

INT. CLINIC

NURSE

(to Nic)

What are you doing?!

Shakeila looks out from the hallway. She rushes in.

SHAKEILA

He will be seen! Bring him here!

INT. CLINIC SUPPLY ROOM

Nic and Shakeila enter a small supply room. He hands Shakeila the bag. She takes the bag, examines the contents. Shakeila beams, but then turns serious.

SHAKEILA

Thank you. Now go. You must leave
and not come back. Dadullah will
kill you if he finds you here.

Shakeila moves toward the door, motions for Nic to go. But then from OS comes the sound of a vehicle parking. Shakeila puts her hand up for Nic to stop, she moves to a window, peeks out.

POV: SHAKEILA, observing as Dadullah and his men exit their Land Cruiser.

DADULLAH

(to Hassan)

Where is Nic?!

HASSAN

I don't know. I think he's walking?

DADULLAH
Walking?!

Dadullah walks directly toward the clinic, sits on the mat outside. He picks his toes, glances at the clinic.

BACK TO: Shakeila, quickly going back to the supply room.

INT. CLINIC SUPPLY ROOM

SHAKEILA
Dadullah is sitting outside.
(closes the door)
He will not stay long. He usually
has business to handle.

NIC
You've known him a long time?

SHAKEILA
Yes, since I was a child. We grew
up together. His father worked for
my father.

NIC
I see. And your husband?

SHAKEILA
A car bombing. I am carrying out
the work my husband and I started.
We came back here in 2002 from
Pakistan. We opened some clinics,
and he was killed later. This is
the only clinic left, now.

NIC
Why was he killed?

SHAKEILA
The mullahs did not like us having
too much power over the people.
They liked to control things.

NIC
And Mussah Khan?

SHAKEILA
He is my brother-in-law.

NIC

I see. Oh. Almost forgot.

Nic pulls the bottle of scarlet red nail polish, puts it on the counter. Shakeila sees it and her face fills with joy. Then she changes back to dark.

SHAKEILA

Why are you here?

NIC

I'm a consultant. For your government. Ministry of Counter Narcotics, believe it or not. But I used to—

SHAKEILA

No, I don't mean that. Why did you come here today? Why did you bring the medicine, and especially, why did you bring that?

(points at polish)

NIC

Well—

SHAKEILA

It could easily get us killed.

Dadullah can be heard getting up and talking, OS.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

You must leave by the side door.
And don't ever come back here.

Shakeila opens the door to the hallway and they both walk out. The red nail polish remains on the counter.

EXT. CLINIC/COMPOUND COURTYARD

Shakeila and Nic separate, Nic walks around from the side of the clinic where Dadullah, his men, and Hassan have gathered.

DADULLAH

Nic! Where have you been?!

NIC

Walking?

DADULLAH
Let's go! The elders are waiting!
Don't be late like this again!

They walk to the vehicles. Hassan gives Nic a look, which Nic returns with a sly grin.

EXT. FIELD ERADICATION - DAY

Nic, Hassan, Dadullah and his men are with villagers watching a poppy field burn.

DADULLAH
(in Pashto)
Nic, take the chopping stick and
let's go.

Nic hesitates, not understanding.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)
Just do it! Are you afraid?

Nic realizes he's being challenged. He smiles and nods, all three of them move into the poppy field.

They walk on. The stalks get higher. Soon they can no longer see anything but poppy.

HASSAN
Where is Dadullah?

Nic looks around, concerned. Then they hear the whine of an ATV buzzing near their position. It gets louder and closer.

NIC
C'mon.

Nic leads them ahead faster, but they make little progress in the tangled stalks. The ATV is very close now.

Nic turns and sees the ATV plowing through the stalks, directly for him. He dives to the side, the ATV passes.

It's Dadullah. Hassan finds Nic, helps him up.

HASSAN
You okay?

NIC

Yeah.

They hear the ATV again from the other side. They turn, it's right on top of them. They dive out of the way.

They get up and run at top speed until they're back to the vehicles. Dadullah is there on the ATV, waiting for them.

DADULLAH

Nic! How was your walking?

Dadullah smiles as Nic and Hassan catch their breath.

INT/EXT. CLINIC - EVENING

Shakeila walks down the hallway putting her burqa on. She walks to the parking lot, Siddiq waits on his motorcycle.

Dadullah's Land Cruiser suddenly pulls into the yard next to them and stops. Dadullah is driving

DADULLAH

(to Shakeila)

Please get in.

SIDDIQ

She always goes with me!

DADULLAH

Not today.

Shakeila's not happy, at all. She comforts Siddiq.

SHAKEILA

It's okay. I will soon be home.

Siddiq hesitates, then reluctantly rides off. Shakeila gets in the Land Cruiser next to Dadullah. It pulls away.

In the BG is Nic, who's seen everything.

INT. DADULLAH'S LAND CRUISER

Silence. Shakeila has her burqa over her face.

DADULLAH

You are truly beautiful.

SHAKEILA

We should not be together alone.
Mussah Khan would not like it.

DADULLAH

Not true. He asked me to speak with
you. Wedding preparations are not
occurring. He's not happy.

Shakeila leans against the door as if to hide.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

Why do you not want an old ram for
a husband?

(laughs)

Oh, Shakeila. When we were young,
how I admired you. And I have
thought of you every day all of the
years since then. When you married
Wahid, I hated it. Too bad for me.

SHAKEILA

You were a sweet boy then. And now?

DADULLAH

Poppy made me rich. Thank you,
Russia!

SHAKEILA

Rich.

(beat)

You must never speak to me like
this again. If Mussah Khan were to
find out—

DADULLAH

He won't. He does not care for you,
anyway. I think he'd be happy if
you had an accident. Or perhaps if
you gave him excuses to kill you.
Yes? He might be very interested to
know that the American came to see
you in the clinic.

Dadullah slams the brakes, the Cruiser stops.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

Why did you see him?!

SHAKEILA

I didn't.

DADULLAH

You lie!

He reaches into her bag on the seat. She resists but he pulls the bottle of scarlet polish, shows it to her.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

And did Allah send the bottle?

Shakeila grabs the bottle from his hand, thrusts it back into her bag. Dadullah puts the Cruiser in gear, continues on.

EXT. DADULLAH'S LAND CRUISER

The Land Cruiser arrives at Shakeila's house, Shakeila opens the door to leave.

DADULLAH

Shakeila-jan, I am happy that you will soon be living in the compound. We will become closer.

SHAKEILA

(icy)

I am sorry, but I do not have feeling for you. None at all.

DADULLAH

(very angry)

You will! I swear it! You will see.

SHAKEILA

No. And Mussah Khan will never allow you to touch me.

DADULLAH

Are you so sure?

SHAKEILA

Go!

DADULLAH

He is going close the clinic.

Shakeila panics.

SHAKEILA

Liar. He cannot do that! The clinic
is for the people. If it is gone—

DADULLAH

It is decided!

SHAKEILA

It is not!

Shakeila runs into the house. Dadullah watches her go, his
disgust and anger obvious. He engages the Cruiser, burns off.

EXT. KHAN GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

Nic is here, in deep thought. He looks over the night
landscape. He turns and leaves, walks down the stairs to...

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND/OUTSIDE CLINIC

Nic walks, takes a vague look at the clinic. His cellular
chimes. E-mail.

ANGLE OF: PHONE, e-mail from Emily. Says, "You didn't call."

BACK TO: NIC, who blankly pockets his phone, continues on.

EXT. ROAD - DAWN

The small convoy of Nic's eradication team rapidly crosses.

EXT. RURAL VILLAGE - MID-MORNING

The eradication team sits in their vehicles as Nic, Hassan,
and Dadullah emerge from the mosque with the village elders.

NIC

(to Dadullah)

Any chance I can get you to ride an
ATV for an hour?

DADULLAH

My work with you is done for the
day. I have other duties, now.

NIC

Well, thanks for not telling me.

DADULLAH

I don't have to tell you anything.
And don't worry, Nic: I will be
waiting for you.

Dadullah walks away to his SUV. Nic and Hassan look at each other, puzzled.

EXT. CLINIC - AFTERNOON

Siddiq and Marina sit outside, reading together.

INT. CLINIC

Shakeila has a tea, intensely studies a medical manual in her office. There's a knock.

SHAKEILA

Yes?

Dadullah opens the door and lets himself in.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

Again?! What are you doing here?!
It's not allowed!

DADULLAH

(smiles)

Your personal guards let me in.

Shakeila looks toward the clinic window, sees Siddiq and Marina sitting outside. She looks back at Dadullah.

Dadullah walks around the room looking at things, picking them up and putting them down. Shakeila watches the ritual, becomes nervous.

DADULLAH (CONT'D)

Have you seen Nic today?

SHAKEILA

Why would I see him?

DADULLAH

I was with him. He asked about you.

SHAKEILA
Oh? What did he want?

DADULLAH
He wants *you*.

SHAKEILA
Ridiculous! Get out of here,
please. You don't belong here.

DADULLAH
(genuine)
I don't think you understand the
situation. I love you. Perhaps
since before we were even born. And
I know you love me, as well. You
must only accept it.

SHAKEILA
You are completely crazy! Get out
of here before Mussah Khan finds
out and has us *both* killed!

DADULLAH
I would love nothing better than to
go to my grave with you.

SHAKEILA
You have completely lost your mind.
I am telling Mussah Khan, now!

Shakeila tries to rush past him. Dadullah blocks her way and
suddenly grabs her arms.

DADULLAH
I know you want to be with me.

She struggles, he rips her clothing, enraging her.

SHAKEILA
Get out!

Dadullah releases his grip.

DADULLAH
Soon I will do whatever I want.

Shakeila slaps him. Hard. His pain matches his surprise.

SHAKEILA

Dog!

Something in Dadullah's demeanor changes. He seems suddenly ashamed. He does not look Shakeila in the eyes.

He turns and walks slowly out of the office.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

And don't come back!

Shakeila watches him leave, sees her children sitting outside. She decides something.

EXT. CLINIC

Shakeila runs out of the clinic. Alemzaib is hovering in the BG, unnoticed.

SHAKEILA

Siddiq! Marina! Let's go! Now!

SIDDIQ

But where are we going?

SHAKEILA

Home!

They get on the bike and quickly exit. And, Dadullah is watching, eyes burning. He moves out as Alemzaib observes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - A LITTLE LATER

Shakeila, Marina, Siddiq, on the motorcycle. They're speeding along, minding their own business.

Behind them a black Land Cruiser appears. This time it's obviously Dadullah at the wheel. He easily gains on the motorcycle, drives dangerously close.

Siddiq keeps calm, but they're all concerned. And then Dadullah suddenly cranks the wheel to the left and blasts around them, driving ahead.

SHAKEILA

Idiot!

Dadullah applies the brakes, the motorcycle shoots past. Siddiq continues, and it seems Dadullah has stopped.

But no.

Dadullah floors it, and in no time is back behind the bike. Dadullah then pulls to their left again, pacing in parallel.

Siddiq keeps the bike straight and steady. And then Dadullah swerves hard, Siddiq corrects, Marina screams.

They all hold tight, Dadullah swerves again. Siddiq struggles to keep control. He starts looking around.

Siddiq hits the brakes, barely keeps the bike standing as it skids to a near stop. He cranks to the right, the bike bounces off into the relatively flat desert.

Dadullah slams his brakes, but Siddiq's bike is now easily out of reach.

Dadullah looks down the highway, sees a dirt road. He drives toward it.

EXT. DIRT ROAD

Siddiq bounces out of the desert and onto a dirt road. He speeds down the road, leaving lots of dust.

All calm for a moment, and then the sound of Dadullah's Land Cruiser approaching. It enters frame proceeding as fast as Dadullah can drive, and in the same direction as Shakeila and her kids.

EXT. POPPY FIELD - DAY

ANA guys on ATVs plow-down poppy stalks. Nic and Hassan watch from the sidelines.

They hear a powerful sound of engines. Three US Army humvees, with M60 roof gunners, appear on the road at the far end of the poppy field, armed US and AFGHAN SOLDIERS inside each.

Nic and Hassan turn; Nic's eyes narrow.

HASSAN
Is this bad?

NIC
Doubt it. Out for insurgents,
probably.

HUSSAN
Here?

NIC
I guess. Who knows?

Then they hear another engine, coming from the opposite direction: The motorcycle with Siddiq, Marina and Shakeila, on the dirt road.

And the motorcycle is on a collision course with the humvees.

HASSAN
They're going to get shot, Nic!

NIC
(fire alarmed; yells
toward the bike)
No! Go back!

INT. LEAD US HUMVEE

Inside the lead humvee sit two US soldiers: A DRIVER, and in the passenger seat, his CAPTAIN.

DRIVER
Captain, look ahead.

The captain sees the motorcycle speeding their way.

CAPTAIN
(yelling to roof gunner)
Shit. M60! Stop that bike!

EXT. POPPY FIELD ROAD

The M60 fires, bullets rake across the bike's front tire, and at least one bullet hits Siddiq.

Motorcycle crashes.

Nic and Hassan run toward the wrecked motorcycle in the field. Nic arrives to find Siddiq unconscious and bleeding. He immediately applies pressure to Siddiq's shoulder wound.

Shakeila and Marina get up, cut and bruised. Shakeila rips off her burqa, rushes to Siddiq, begins removing his shirt.

The small humvee convoy slams to a halt, kicking clouds of dirt. Armed US soldiers exit.

US SOLDIER #1

(to Nic)

Lemme see the hands!

NIC

Get a medic, dumbass.

The Captain walks forward.

CAPTAIN

At ease! Well, Nic Johnson.

Figures.

(unconcerned, to soldier)

Get the meds over here.

(to Nic)

Sorry about the mix-up. You know we always go for the tire. Musta been a ricochet.

On this, Dadullah's black Land Cruiser appears on the road, moves toward them quickly. Neither the US soldiers or the captain seem concerned.

Hassan helps Marina—who has a deep, bleeding gash on her forehead—while Nic and Shakeila hover over Siddiq, whose shirt is now off. Shakeila makes a field tourniquet from the shirt as a trio of US MEDICS arrive, two with a small stretcher, the other with only a med kit.

Dadullah parks. He exits, runs over. The captain nods at Dadullah, who first examines Marina, then Siddiq.

DADULLAH

What has happened?!

NIC

You tell us.

Dadullah looks fire toward the captain.

The medics with the stretcher stop at Siddiq, the other medic goes to Marina. The two with Siddiq start to treat him, and Shakeila tries to help.

NIC (CONT'D)
(to Shakeila)
Let them do it.

Shakeila resists for a beat or two, then moves back, remains very concerned but composed.

Nic stands, looks angrily at the Captain. The medics go to work, put Siddiq on the stretcher, start tending his wound.

MEDIC #1
Deep. We'll need to get him a room.

CAPTAIN
Shit. Alright, load him up.

SHAKEILA
I must go with him.

CAPTAIN
No can do.

NIC
She's a doctor. She should go.

MEDIC #1
Okay, let's load him.

With Siddiq prepped, the medics lift his stretcher and haul it to the second humvee, while the other medic bandages Marina's forehead.

DADULLAH
(to Shakeila)
What are you doing here?!

For a beat, Shakeila angrily consider his words. But then she ignores and rushes off with the medics.

Nic and Dadullah stare at one-another with contempt. Nic looks at the captain, then back at Dadullah.

EXT. SECOND HUMVEE

Siddiq is loaded into the rear area while Shakeila hovers. Nic trots up. Shakeila attempts to get in the humvee with Siddiq, one of the US soldiers yanks her back, rudely. She falls to the ground.

NIC

Hey!

Nic reflexively pushes the soldier backward, very hard. The soldier slams to the side of the humvee, responds by racking Nic across the face with the butt of his rifle.

Nic staggers backward, his lip split, but he quickly recovers, ready for action. All the nearby Afghan and US soldiers train their weapons on Nic as the captain runs over.

CAPTAIN

Stand down, Goddammit, stand down!

NIC

She needs to go with her kid.

CAPTAIN

Nic, there's absolutely no way, you know that.

(to medic)

Where we takin' him?

MEDIC #2

Have to be Kabul.

CAPTAIN

Alright, let's take the girl too, make sure she's alright.

Dadullah rushes up, with Shakeila's burqa. He forcefully puts it over her head. Nic moves to jump in, but...

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Nic!

Nic stops, his faces shows that he gets the warning.

DADULLAH

(glares at Shakeila)

So, it's true!

(to Nic)

Mussah Khan will kill for touching his woman!

(to the captain)

He must be arrested!

The captain looks at Nic, motions to a soldier for a phone. The soldier brings a sat phone, the captain dials.

A bandaged Marina arrives, holding the hand of a medic as she's escorted to the same door as Siddiq, then lifted in. Dadullah grabs Shakeila hard, pushes her toward his Land Cruiser. She doesn't resist, keeps her eyes on Nic.

CAPTAIN

(on phone)

Sir, this is Capt. Stanford. We got a problem.

Dadullah forces Shakeila to the Land Cruiser. She's then practically thrown into the front seat by Dadullah.

Nic can only watch.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Nic? Mr. Reardon on the line.

NIC

Shit.

(takes phone)

Hello, Stan. Yeah. Yeah. No problem. Alright.

(hands phone back)

Thanks.

Hassan walks over as the Siddiq SUV's doors close and the soldiers start to close shop. In the BG, Dadullah's Land Cruiser spins tires as it drives away.

HASSAN

Well?

NIC

We're fucked. Can't go back to Khan's place, that's for sure.

Nic looks around, takes in the poppy field, the soldiers, the receding black Land Cruiser. He looks tired.

NIC (CONT'D)

Get our bags, bring them out to USAID, please.

HASSAN

Sure, Nic. You be careful. It seems there are even jackals living with the wolves out here.

NIC
You saw it, too.

HASSAN
Of course. Dadullah is dirty. For certain.

NIC
Maybe not. Could be nothing.

CAPTAIN
C'mon, Nic. We'll drop you on the way.

NIC
Not gonna arrest me?

CAPTAIN
Not unless you want us to.

Nic pats Hassan on the shoulder, gets in the humvee. The convoy pulls-out as Hassan watches.

EXT. KABUL CITY - DAY

Very busy and noisy. Azar is here, in a bustling row of street vendors selling food. He's at a particular stand, reaching for an order he's made, when his cellular rings. He looks at the phone screen, dreads the call but answers.

AZAR
Nic! How are you? Yes. No, it's true. The Governor called Zarar straight away. Nic, this is Pashtun honor code stuff. Our hands are tied, I'm sorry. No, it's immediate. I know, Nic. I know. Look, Zarar says to keep in touch. This might all blow over, and we'd love to have you back, of course. You, too. Thanks, Nic.

Azar hangs up, begins his meal as he walks away.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Nic is on his feet, very solemn. Stan busily fills out some kind of paperwork.

A FEMALE ASSISTANT, 23, appears with two coffees. She leaves them on Stan's desk, exits. Nic takes a coffee, moves to the office window and looks out.

STAN

You really are a shithead. All the burgas in this Goddamned hellhole, and you gotta pick her.

NIC

Where is she?

STAN

Back with Khan, of course.

NIC

Dadullah's your boy, isn't he?

STAN

He keeps me abreast of things time to time. Could end today. No loss.

(beat)

Nic, you do know that Shakeila's about to become Khan's wife, right?

NIC

Wife?!

STAN

Oh, I'm sorry. But really, Nic, the only thing you need to be concerned about right now is getting outta this dirty country. *Alive.*

Nic gives him a look that drips disrespect.

STAN (CONT'D)

Nic, you were found in a poppy field with the *Governor's fiancée!*

NIC

Wasn't "with" her, I was doin' my fuckin' job. Had no idea she was marrying the Goddamned Governor. She doesn't love that guy.

STAN

They don't marry for love out here, Nic. You know that.

NIC

This is all just a lot of bullshit.

STAN

Don't matter what you think. *They* think you shit all over their beloved Pashtun honor. I'm actually surprised they didn't shoot her. Dead bride. That'd be somethin'.

(beat)

Anyway, window or aisle?

NIC

Wait, wait, hold on. I'm far from done here. I'm not going anywhere.

STAN

Wrong and wrong. Too dangerous for you, now. Can't have it. The Embassy says you gotta go, and it falls on me. Don't kill the messenger, Nic.

Nic glares long and hard at Stan, thinks for a beat.

NIC

Where'd they take her kids? Which hospital? Bagram?

STAN

Nope. Rabi-a-balkhi.
(pushes his phone
intercom)
Get in here, please.

Stan gets up to leave. His assistant enters.

STAN (CONT'D)

Take Mr. Johnson's paperwork over to accounting and get his travel straightened out.

The assistant takes the small stack of papers Stan had been working on, exits.

STAN (CONT'D)

You got a long flight ahead, so you go rest yourself out there in one of our comfy trailers.

(MORE)

STAN (CONT'D)

We'll call when we're ready.

(walks out, voice recedes)

Next time, Nic, buy yourself a hooker. They're sure cheaper.

EXT. NIC'S TRAILER - LATE AFTERNOON

A small, wheelless trailer, in a surreal row of other such trailers. USAID AFGHAN GUARDS are posted just outside.

INT. NIC'S TRAILER

Small, Spartan space. Nic looks out the front window at the guards. He moves to a tidy bed, sits, checks his watch.

EXT. USAID COMPOUND

Hassan appears, smoking a cigarette. He AD LIB offers cigarettes to the guards. They AD LIB chat.

INT. NIC'S TRAILER

Nic hears the chatter, moves carefully to the window.

NIC'S POV: HASSAN, handing one of the guards a small envelope. The guard lightly opens the envelope's flap. Both guards motion "thanks" to Hassan, walk away.

Hassan looks toward the trailer, and all around.

BACK TO: NIC, who moves quickly out of scene.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK

Hassan drives Nic's SUV at a quick pace. Nic's in the passenger seat.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Hassan pulls to the side of the road, drives into the desert. After a brief crossing, Alemzaib appears in the headlights.

Nic gets out and greets the boy. Then they disappear together, into the cover of dark.

EXT. KHAN'S COMPOUND - LATER

Alemzaib guides Nic through the desert to the exterior of Khan's compound. Guards outside are sitting and talking.

ALEMZAIB

Wait.

Alemzaib walks up to the guards. After a brief exchange they open the gate for him. Nic waits, his calm nature seems counter to the situation.

There's a small sound and then a rope with equidistant hand-hold knots appears at his feet, having been thrown over the interior compound wall.

Nic checks the tension, starts a climb. Rather expertly.

INT. SHAKEILA'S RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Shakeila sits in a nikah (wedding dress). She looks defeated, despondent. Four OLDER AFGHAN WOMEN surround her, one of whom is dyeing Shakeila's hands with henna, while a second one does the same to her feet. A third braids Shakeila's hair to three long plaits, a fourth makes adjustments to the dress, pinning here and there.

The woman braiding Shakeila's hair quietly SINGS an Afghan wedding song. Shakeila, detached, stares at the ground. A knock at the door breaks her stare.

MUSSAH KHAN (OS)

I want to come in.

SHAKEILA

(to the four women)

Leave me, please.

The older women pause and look at her. Shakeila holds her chin up. The women get it, slowly exit the room.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

You may come.

Mussah Khan opens the door and walks in. Shakeila doesn't look at him.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

Where are my children?

MUSSAH KHAN

Both in Kabul, at hospital. They
will return after the wedding. All
is well, my dear.

SHAKEILA

I will kill myself if my children
are harmed.

Mussah Khan ignores this then sits, considers her.

MUSSAH KHAN

What were you doing in the field,
with the American?

SHAKEILA

Dadullah came to the clinic. He
mistreated me. I wanted to come to
you, but I was afraid. I took the
children and ran. Dadullah ran us
off the road. The field was an
accident, nothing more.

MUSSAH KHAN

Dadullah mistreated you?

SHAKEILA

Yes. He told me he wanted to be
with me. That he loves me. Then he
tried to hurt us on the road.

MUSSAH KHAN

And yet, I saw the way the American
looked at you.

(beat)

Dadullah is faithful to me and he
would give his life for me.

Mussah Khan rises, stands over her.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

And I would do anything for him.
Anything. Do you understand?

(walks toward door, turns)

If you ever open your mouth to
dishonor this family, it will be
your last act on earth. I swear it.

(MORE)

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

I have been a patient with you, but
now I will listen to nothing
further. You must do your duty as
my wife, and be obedient.

Mussah Khan opens the door, walks out. Shakeila verges tears
of anger and sorrow.

Another knock at the door. This one is careful.

SHAKEILA

No! Go away!

The door gently opens, it's Nic and Alemzaib. Both stealthily
move in, quietly close the door. Shakeila cannot believe what
she's seeing. She's dazed for a moment.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

How did you get here?! You must
leave, now!

Nic walks to her as Alemzaib observes. Nic reaches out and
grabs her hand. They regard each other, powerfully.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

They will kill me if I go.

NIC

They might anyway. Why didn't you
tell me about this?

SHAKEILA

(tearing)

I don't know. Perhaps telling would
have been worse.

NIC

We have to get you out. We'll go
straight to Kabul for the kids.

SHAKEILA

No. My life is over. Just get my
children and take them with you.

NIC

Your life's *not* over. And you can't
spend the rest of it in this
compound. Think of the kids. Come
with me. Please.

Shakeila, tears streaming (but not crying) consider him. Suddenly she stands and thrusts herself into his arms. They embrace as she gently cries. Nic awkwardly enjoys and yet doesn't know quite how to handle this Afghan woman in her wedding dress.

There's an OS sound of female voices approaching: The four older wedding attendants. Shakeila is briefly panicked, Nic puts his index finger to his mouth for her silence.

Nic nods toward Alemzaib, who then opens the exterior door and checks for safety. He nods to Nic.

Nic takes Shakeila's hand, leads her out. Alemzaib gently closes the door after. The room is empty.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Moon and lonely desert. Nic's Land Cruiser crosses, the only car seen.

INT. LAND CRUISER

Hassan drives, Nic's on the passenger side, Shakeila's in the seat behind them. No one says a word.

Nic looks at Shakeila in the rearview, her face is all worry. Nic looks out the window to nighted deserts, wondering.

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND - NIGHT

Dadullah's Land Cruiser arrives, Marina in the passenger seat. Mussah Khan, two aides, and Alemzaib await Dadullah in the courtyard.

Dadullah exits the Cruiser.

DADULLAH
(to Marina)
Stay here.

Dadullah walks and greets Khan. Alemzaib looks worried. Khan notices Marina in the Land Cruiser.

MUSSAH KHAN
The girl? How did you manage going
to Kabul so quickly?

DADULLAH

I didn't. I got her from the American captain. I made him think he needed to hand her over to me. Some Pashtunwali bullshit. All you have to do with Americans is say it is for Pashtunwali. They have a really warped sense of honor.

Khan considers this, his anger growing.

MUSSAH KHAN

Shakeila has gone. She is marked. She must die to erase the sin on this family.

DADULLAH

(stunned)

No, she would not leave. She must have been taken.

MUSSAH KHAN

Do not be blinded by infatuations. Shakeila is tainted. She left on her own. But she certainly had help. We will soon discover how.

Khan looks toward Marina, thinking for a moment. He studies Dadullah, practically glares at him.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

Kill the girl. Now.

Dadullah looks at Khan in total disbelief.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

Marina is tainted, like her mother. I saw her lead the American into the clinic. She would never do this if she were clean before Allah.

DADULLAH

But she's just a little girl. *Our* girl! How can you—

MUSSAH KHAN

Do not question. But the boy Siddiq. He is a *good* boy.

(MORE)

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

You will go to Kabul in the morning
and bring him back to us.

Dadullah is reluctant to go. He stares at Khan for a couple
beats, then returns to his Land Cruiser.

KHAN

(to Alemzaib)

Attend, dear boy.

Khan motions toward the Hojra. Alemzaib knows the drill.
Dadullah starts his Cruiser, drives away, dazed.

INT. HOJRA - NIGHT

Mussah Khan and Alemzaib enter, with the attendants.

MUSSAH KHAN

(to attendants)

Leave us.

The aides leave, Khan moves to a floor mat, sits. He beckons
Alemzaib, who moves toward him.

Khan gently pulls Alemzaib down, into his lap, lightly kisses
him on the lips.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)

What troubles you?

ALEMZAIB

I am saddened about Shakeila.

Khan gently touches Alemzaib's cheek, smiling at him warmly.
Alemzaib settles into Khan's arms, like a security blanket.
They snuggle together, Khan sweetly kisses the boy a couple
more times.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A vast wasteland, Dadullah's Land Cruiser passing through.

INT. DADULLAH'S LAND CRUISER

Dadullah drives, looks at Marina in the passenger seat. She
sleeps. Dadullah's face is noting but conflict. He slows the
Land Cruiser, turns off the road.

EXT. DADULLAH'S LAND CRUISER

The Cruiser bumps down an unrefined dirt road. After a beat or two, it stops.

INT./EXT. DADULLAH'S LAND CRUISER

Dadullah kills the engine, stares straight ahead. He leaves the headlights on. He looks at Marina, not at all certain.

DADULLAH

Marina-jan.

(nudges her)

Marina-jan.

(she wakes)

Come.

Dadullah exits the Land Cruiser, as does a groggy Marina.

MARINA

What are we doing? Where is my
mother?

Dadullah waits for her at the front of the SUV.

DADULLAH

Allah forgive me.

In the beams of the headlights, he grabs her, throws her to the ground, pulls a pistol. She screams and struggles, but he is far too powerful, and she's neatly pinned.

Dadullah places the muzzle of the pistol against the back of Marina's head. Marina cries violently.

Dadullah cocks the pistol. He hesitates, now in great personal pain.

He squeezes the trigger.

CLICK.

Dadullah is caught off guard by the misfire. He looks at the pistol. With Marina still struggling beneath him, he pulls the pistol's clip, examines it. Full.

His hard face fights back tears. He puts a hand over his mouth, hit by the evil of his actions.

He puts the clip back into the pistol, stands and helps Marina up. He embraces her and she embraces him, crying.

With Marina around him, he walks back to the Land Cruiser.

INT. NIC'S LAND CRUISER - MORNING

Hassan continues to drive, his eyes bleary. Nic and Shakeila have dozed-off. Ahead is a four-way crossroads. Hassan pulls over, the change in motion wakes Nic.

HASSAN

We are here.

Nic looks into the back seat. Shakeila looks peaceful and yet odd, curled in her wedding dress.

HASSAN (CONT'D)

I can still go with you.

NIC

No. You'll never be able to come back if you do.

(puts a hand on Hassan's shoulder)

You've done enough.

A reluctant Hassan nods, opens his door.

EXT. HIGHWAY, FOUR-WAY STOP

Hassan exits, as does Nic, who closes his door and walks to Hassan. They embrace. Hassan smiles, turns and walks into the desert. Nic gets into the driver's side.

Shakeila stirs in her seat. Nic looks back, decides not to disturb her. He puts the Cruiser in gear, drives away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. REMOTE HIGHWAY - LATE MORNING

Nic drives the SUV through a baking desert.

INT. SUV

Shakeila is awake, and sits in the back seat. She looks around. Both she and Nic are tired, but alert.

NIC

How are you?

SHAKEILA

I'm...I do not know.

NIC

We're close to Kabul. Not long.

Shakeila doesn't answer. She only stares at the passing desert. But in a moment that she does not affirm with her expression, she reaches over the seat and places her hand on Nic's shoulder.

It affects him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. REMOTE AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Nic and Shakeila, still driving.

INT. SUV

Shakeila is still in the back seat as Nic sees something ahead. Within a couple beats, it's clearly visible as a fortified checkpoint.

NIC

Son-of-a-bitch.

Shakeila gets down. As they get closer, it's obvious that Afghan soldiers are doing more than checking papers. They're searching trunks, questioning drivers outside the vehicles.

Nic looks in the rearview, there's no one behind him. He thinks quickly, but the options are few.

He slows to a full stop, now in view of the soldiers ahead. A couple of them turn toward the SUV, motion angrily for him to drive forward.

NIC (CONT'D)

Whatever happens, don't get up.

Nic looks off to the side of the road. It's a very flat desert. He looks ahead, the guards are starting a slow walk toward them, weapons loosely ready.

EXT./INT. SUV

Nic floors it, drives off the road and into the flat desert. The two soldiers start firing.

Nic in a very expert move does several donuts in the dirt. The resulting dust is intense, completely covering the SUV and the road. Impromptu smokescreen.

Nic with the steering wheel cranked counts silently with his lips: One, two, three, four...and then corrects the wheel by letting go of it.

The SUV bounces and shudders but then emerges onto the highway...crossways. Nic grabs the wheel again, turns back the way they came.

Over random, useless gunfire, they're off. A few beats later, when they're down the highway with no pursuit, Nic speaks.

NIC (CONT'D)

I know a road through the mountains. Takes longer, but we should be fine.

SHAKEILA

Thank you, Nic.

The SUV continues down the highway.

EXT. CLINIC/KHAN'S COMPOUND - DAY

Dadullah is here, standing and staring at the Hojra. He's in pain. He's had no sleep.

INT. HOJRA

Mussah Khan is here, enjoying tea and snacks. Dadullah appears in the doorway, to Khan's delight.

MUSSAH KHAN
My Dadullah! You are back! Sit!

Dadullah slowly walks over, sits on the mat across from Khan, who pours him a tea.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
It is done?

Dadullah looks hard at Khan. He doesn't answer.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
What is wrong? Did it not go well?

DADULLAH
You ordered me to kill a child.

MUSSAH KHAN
It is necessary in the eyes of
Allah. We must purify—

DADULLAH
This is not Islam, it is not of
Allah, to murder a little girl!

Khan regards him warily. He puts the tea down.

MUSSAH KHAN
Like Shakeila, you fall away the
first time you are challenged. I am
very disappointed.
(beat)
I will not ask again. Honor and
order must prevail. You will do
what must be done.

Dadullah stares at Khan. Confusion, anger, frustration.

Dadullah suddenly pulls his pistol, which was hidden in his shirt. He simply holds the pistol in his hand.

Khan sighs heavily, but is not afraid. He knows what's coming, and accepts it.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
I see. Then do as you will. May
Allah preserve us.

On this, Dadullah places the muzzle in his own mouth, pulls the trigger. BANG. Dadullah flops sideways, dead.

Mussah Khan observes Dadullah's body, his face revealing very little. He's stunned, shocked, and then, dismayed. He then moves quickly to Dadullah's dead body, cradles it in his arms, his back heaving in sorrow.

Guards, aides and the clinic nurse rush into the Hojra.

MUSSAH KHAN (CONT'D)
My wonderful Dadullah! Allah bless
his soul.

No one knows quite what to do.

EXT. REMOTE AFGHANISTAN - DAY INTO AFTERNOON

VARIOUS DISSOLVING SHOTS of Nic and Shakeila driving a rough dirt roads, moving between mountains up a narrow pass, across a stream.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Nic and Shakeila, still driving.

INT. SUV

NIC
We're gonna need gas. You okay?

SHAKEILA
I'll be fine when Marina and Siddiq
are here and safe. How much longer,
Nic?

NIC
By dusk. Maybe sooner.

Shakeila stares at him across the cab. He feels it, looks at her, looks back to the road.

SHAKEILA
What will you do next? Go home?

NIC
Haven't thought ahead that far.
Can't stay, that's for sure. You?

SHAKEILA

I also don't know.

NIC

Ever thought about England?

SHAKEILA

I do not wish to leave my country.
I love my people, my land. Do you
think that's foolish?

NIC

Not at all.

EXT. HIGHWAY

In a couple beats, they pull into a gas station. A few AFGHAN PEOPLE are here and there, and they definitely take a look at Nic and Shakeila.

Nic gets out. An ATTENDANT approaches. Nic pays using native tongue, then goes to pump. He starts the gas, looks around, looks toward the busy highway.

He casually watches traffic when he sees a familiar vehicle: Dadullah's black Land Cruiser speeds by, headed for Kabul.

Nic quickly finishes, gets back into the SUV. He peels away from the station.

INT. SUV

SHAKEILA

What's wrong?

NIC

Dadullah.

SHAKEILA

No! We must stop him! Nic!

NIC

Hold on.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Nic approaches Dadullah's Land Cruiser from the rear.

There's at least a quarter mile between them, traffic becomes more and more dense.

EXT. KABUL CITY - DAY

Both vehicles enter Kabul outskirts, Nic's SUV gains on the black Land Cruiser. But traffic gets more and more chaotic, and even with Nic's skills, there's not much he can do.

Finally they're stuck in a classic Kabul traffic jam. Several car lengths ahead, the black Land Cruiser is allowed to pass, while Nic and Shakeila are unable to move.

They watch the Land Cruiser disappear down the road.

EXT. NIC'S SUV - LATER

Nic and Shakeila drive past the Serena Hotel, scene of the party at the beginning. Nic drives fast, evades cars.

EXT. RABIA BALKHI HOSPITAL

Finally at the front of the hospital, they pull up and jump out of the SUV, running upstairs.

INT. HOSPITAL (VARIOUS)

Nic and Shakeila scan around, looking in rooms and down halls. They walk into a room full of patients, they see Siddiq, standing with his back toward them.

He's missing an arm.

SHAKEILA

Oh God!

Shakeila turns Siddiq around...but it's not Siddiq. The unknown boy looks at her like she's crazy.

SHAKEILA (CONT'D)

Oh. I'm sorry.

They leave the room and walk into another. They look around. Shakeila becomes frantic and enters room after room with Nic trying to keep up. An ELDERLY AFGHAN NURSE approaches.

ELDERLY NURSE

Can I help you?

SHAKEILA

I'm looking for my children. A boy twelve years-old. He had a bullet wound in his shoulder. And a ten year-old girl, Marina, with a scrape on her head.

ELDERLY NURSE

The boy's name was Siddiq?

SHAKEILA

Yes! Yes, that's him!

ELDERLY NURSE

He left twenty minutes ago.

SHAKEILA

What?!

NIC

Please. Who got the boy?

ELDERLY NURSE

A very large man. The Governor of Helmand was with him. He said he was his uncle. He did say that Marina would be happy to see Siddiq, but there was no Marina here. Not for weeks.

Helpless, devastated, Shakeila turns, runs down the hallway.

SHAKEILA

MARINA! SIDDIQ!

Nic chases after her, tries to comfort.

NIC

Shakeila! Stop! It's too late! It's too late.

SHAKEILA

(sobbing loudly)

No! No! I want my children!

Shakeila violently rips off her burqa and faces Nic. Tears of anguish stream down her face.

Nic looks around, pulls Shakeila into a small supply room, closes the door behind them.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM

Supplies, boxes, a small chair. Nic holds Shakeila as she cries. He sort of melts into her. She looks up at him, he wipes her tears.

SHAKEILA

I do not want to live.

NIC

Yes you do. We'll find them.

SHAKEILA

How? How can this happen?

Nic doesn't answer. He only looks at her. They remain this way for a moment, and then she pulls Nic's face onto hers. They kiss, uncomfortably. Nic pulls away, flustered.

She re-embraces him. He doesn't resist this time. Nic gently grabs her face with both hands, his face intense.

Nic gently breaks free from her, sorts his thoughts with his back to her as he watches.

NIC

I'll find a land line and make a call.

SHAKEILA

Who? Why no cell?

NIC

Just wait here. Don't leave.

SHAKEILA

Where would I go?

Nic opens the door, leaves the supply room.

Shakeila sits defeatedly in the small chair here. She's not sure *what* to think or do.

EXT. KHAN GUARD TOWER - LATE AFTERNOON

A peaceful Mussah Khan is here, looking out over the orchards and deserts. Two of his men approach from up the stairs behind. He doesn't turn. The men bring Siddiq, who's wearing a sling and bandages.

The trio stops a few feet behind Khan, who hasn't turned.

MUSSAH KHAN
Boy Siddiq. I'm glad you are back.

SIDDIQ
Where is my mother and sister?

MUSSAH KHAN
I sent them to Lashgar Gah to buy wedding ornaments. Now go to your room and rest until they return.

Khan motions with his hand, they take the boy away. One of the guards stops, however, and speaks to Khan when Siddiq is out of earshot.

KHAN GUARD #1
Marina cannot be found. Anywhere.

The guard turns and leaves, Khan studies his own land.

EXT. KABUL - NIGHT

In a busy public area we see Rana emerge from a crowd. She's well-dressed, official looking.

She looks around, sees a pair of black SUVs sitting on the street nearby, their engines running. An obviously American man stands beside one of the SUVs, in business casual.

She walks that way.

INT. SUV

William sits waiting. The door opens for Rana, she enters, sits opposite William. They look at each other with no love.

WILLIAM
I assume you know what's going on.

She does a single nod.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
How do you feel about it?

RANA
We're very happy. I'm sure you are
as well.

WILLIAM
Not especially. Not really what we
had in mind.

RANA
But it works. And that's all it
needs to do.

William seems pleased off this.

WILLIAM
This Chief of Party, Stan, at
USAID: What do you think?

RANA
We know all about him. There won't
be a problem. He'll be as happy as
anyone else.

WILLIAM
(warm fake smile)
Appreciate your cooperation.

RANA
And we yours. Cheers.

WILLIAM
Cheers.

Rana exits, the door closes, the SUV pulls away.

EXT. MOUNTAINS AND DESERTS - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

Scene opens with the sun actually climbing and breaking over
a saddle between mountains (not time lapse).

EXT. KHAN'S COMPOUND - DAWN

Light creeps over a seemingly deserted Khan Compound. Only the two normally posted guards are visible.

EXT. HOJRA

All quiet. KHAN GUARD #2 paces. The guard then hears a plane engine, high above the compound. He looks up, sees something. He uses his binoculars to scan the sky.

GUARD'S POV: A US Hercules AC-130 Gunship flies a circular target pattern high above the compound, quite well out of Stinger range.

BACK TO: GUARD, who is confused and concerned. He moves toward the Hojra, enters.

INT. HOJRA

The guard enters. Mussah Khan is here, casually drinking tea and looking at a glowing laptop screen.

KHAN GUARD #2

Mussah Khan: An American gunship
circles the compound.

MUSSAH KHAN

(chuckles)

Not possible. Why would they come
here?

KHAN GUARD #2

You should see.

Khan, irritated, stands and walks out of the Hojra.

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND

NOTE: THERE IS NO AUDIBLE DIALOGUE, UNTIL SPECIFIED

In the growing light of morning, Khan walks into the compound courtyard with Guard #2. Others emerge as well. Khan is handed a pair of binoculars.

Khan looks through the binoculars, studies, then lowers them. He's clearly convinced it's a gunship, but has no idea why.

On this, a powerful sound begins: Chopper blades. In a few beats a US Army Apache helicopter appears in the sky just outside the compound. It hovers, the business end of its weaponry pointed toward the compound.

Khan's men assemble, one emerges with RPG ready. Khan firmly motions him to stand down, and AD LIB tells the others to keep their weapons lowered.

On this, another chopper appears: A large, official US Military transport copter, suitable for many passengers. This one is clearly a flagship of some kind.

The copter hovers for a moment, then descends. As Khan's people move out of the way, the copter lands.

One of the side doors opens, two US soldiers in full battle gear quickly emerge, weapons ready but not leveled. They stand at either side of the copter door.

As Khan watches, another man steps from the copter. It's the Two-Star General from the hotel party, the one Nic had spoken to briefly in passing. An AIDE TO THE GENERAL steps out as well, carrying a small, compact briefcase.

The General looks around, sees Khan. They both clearly know one-another. Khan smiles, lifts his hands warmly. The General also smiles, and the two meet outside the blade wash, shake hands heartily.

They speak MOS, with the General explaining something to Khan. The General's aide approaches, stands by his side.

On this, Nic emerges from the copter. None of Khan's men lift a finger, though they all see him. Nic makes a call on his cellular, MOS speaks to someone. He hangs up.

The General and Khan continue to talk MOS.

Khan takes a deep breath, thinks about something the General just said. He shakes his head "No" but the General smiles, continues to convince him.

Khan considers, seems reluctant. He clearly looks at the briefcase in the aide's hand, then motions for Guard #1. Khan says something, Guard #1 runs off.

On this, the front gates of the compound open, and two black SUVs enter. They drive near but away from the assembled parties, stop.

Various US and Afghan security emerge from the SUVs.

Guard #1 emerges from the Hojra with a sleepy Siddiq, still in a sling and bandages. The guard brings Siddiq to Khan. The General smiles down at Siddiq, but Khan is clearly torn.

Khan kneels to Siddiq, considers the boy. He says something to him MOS, and then embraces him, his face in pain.

Afterward he releases Siddiq, points him toward Nic. Siddiq recognizes Nic immediately, walks toward him, careful of the blade wash.

Siddiq arrives before Nic. Nic smiles at him, but Siddiq doesn't smile back. He's obviously scared as hell. On this, a back door opens on the second SUV.

Out steps Shakeila, in full burqa. Siddiq sees her, tries to run, Nic stops him. Nic then visually signals for Siddiq to wait a moment.

Khan sees Shakeila and his face is immediately angered. He stares at her. The General looks her way, as well. No words exchanged as they consider her.

On this the door to the clinic opens and the familiar nurse from earlier emerges. After she's outside and sees what's going on, she motions to someone inside the clinic.

Out steps Marina. The nurse takes her hand, walks her toward Shakeila. But Marina breaks into a run; she and Shakeila embrace in reunion.

Every eye in the place is on the event. Khan studies it all, highly displeased. Khan looks to Nic, fire in his gaze. Khan looks to the General, starts wildly scolding him MOS.

In a moment the scolding ends and Khan seems resigned. He looks again to the briefcase and then smiles a huge smile. He puts his hands in the air as if to say, "Why not?" Khan and the General then embrace as officials and diplomats do.

The General then nods to his aide, the briefcase is handed to one of Khan's men. Khan and the General shake hands.

Nic sees where things are. He kneels down to speak with Siddiq, takes Siddiq's hands.

NIC

Go to your mother. And give her
this. But not until you've gone.

Nic hands Siddiq a small box. Siddiq takes it, pockets it, looks at Nic with confusion. Siddiq then suddenly hugs Nic...much to Khan's visual displeasure.

SIDDIQ

I will remember you, Mr. Nic.

The hug breaks, Nic stands. Siddiq turns and walks toward Shakeila. Halfway there he breaks to a run. Now all three, Shakeila, Marina, and Siddiq, embrace.

But it's not to last: They're quickly, almost rudely escorted to the copter by US and Afghan security detail. When there, they all stop and regard Nic, who's standing at the entrance.

Shakeila and Nic stare at one another, her eyes visible behind the burqa. They say nothing. Shakeila and her kids move to enter the copter, but Marina is frightened and won't go. Nic gently assures her, she looks to her mother, and then to Nic.

Marina then suddenly embraces Nic, he embraces back, a little choked-up. He picks her up, gently places her in the copter.

Shakeila and Siddiq follow, are assisted in strapping in. Nic watches for a moment, then walks away, toward the SUVs.

The General and Khan conclude their business, say their farewells. Khan and his men move back as the General and his aide return to the copter.

US soldiers are the last in, the door closes and the copter immediately lifts to the sky, heading out and away. The Apache follows.

Nic watches the one copter go, til it's gone.

Quiet. And then Nic notices Khan staring at him, smiling. Khan nods to Nic, who nods back. Nic then enters the SUV, the door closes, the vehicles exit the compound.

INT. SUV

Nic buckles himself in a back seat which is empty...save for William. Nic looks straight ahead, does not consider William in any way.

William clears his throat. He's all smiles. Nic sits quietly, just looking toward the piece of sky where the General's helicopter had flown.

NIC

So how much did you pay him? Khan?

WILLIAM

Nothing.

NIC

So what was in the case?

WILLIAM

(shit-eating grin)

Classified.

The SUV starts to move.

EXT. KHAN COMPOUND/COURTYARD

An aerial view of Nic and William driving out of the compound, with the other SUVs. Mussah Khan is still standing watching them, the briefcase at his feet.

In the middle of the compound is a single post, with a very dead Alemzaib hanging from it.

The camera PULLS BACK further and further to reveal the compound, the lush gardens and the stark but beautiful Afghan landscape beyond as the sun sets in the distance.

END.